

**LIVING BEYOND THE HORIZON:
OPENING THE CHURCH TO THE BABY BOOM GENERATION**

**A Professional Project
Presented to
the Faculty of the
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**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry**

**by
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ABSTRACT

Living Beyond the Horizon: Opening the Church to the Baby Boom Generation

by

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Many persons in the mainline churches wonder why Baby Boomers, those persons born in the United States during the years 1946-1964, generally do not attend church. This project examines the possibility that a difference in world-view is the primary reason. A model of world-view suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith is developed in Chapter 1, which suggests that there are two possible world-views: one that sees the horizon as a boundary beyond which lies chaos; another that sees the horizon as a point of departure for possibilities and potential. The model further explores how one changes world-view by changing the symbols by which a given world is constructed.

Chapter 2 explores the cultural make-up of three different groups in American society, using a paradigm developed by Tex Sample. He suggests that the majority of current mainline church members come from the cultural right, while the group of Baby Boomers who are absent from mainline churches come primarily from the cultural left. The world-view model is used to analyze the world-views out of which these two groups live.

Chapter 3 then explores Jesus' world-view, by exploring his encounters with six unnamed women. The stories of these encounters come from all four gospels, to see whether Jesus' world-view remains consistent.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore how symbol systems in the church can be changed so that a shift in world-view can take place. Liturgy, language and preaching are examined as the way in which the church creates,

transmits, maintains--and changes--its world-view. Suggestions about how to design the liturgy with an open world-view in mind are given in Chapter 4, after a comparison of two services of Holy Communion in the United Methodist tradition, which are seen to come from the two different world-views. In Chapter 5, Burton L. Mack's gap theory of preaching is explored as a way in which the sermon can enable congregations to envision a new world.

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PREFACE

I write out of the belief that the gospel calls us to wholeness, but that too often gospel wholeness has been obscured by the "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," "oughts" and "musts" imposed through duty and obligation by the church and the society it has supported. I write out of my experience as a Baby Boomer, one of those members of American society born between the years 1946-1964, we who were taught that we could do anything if we simply put our minds to it--even land on the moon. I write out of my experience as a woman, taught by my parents as I was growing up that there was nothing I couldn't do, yet finding as an adult that society continually seeks to limit my options because of my gender. And I write out of a personal experience of relationship in which I tried to open up the world-view of one for whom I cared deeply. But my attempts were overwhelmed by his three decades of boundary-based upbringing and his society-assigned roles, so that he was unable to discover, to claim, and to live out the possibilities within himself.

Especially through this last experience of broken relationship, and in the pain of living as an intelligent, capable woman in a patriarchal society, I have learned that what I propose in this project is not easy, and is not accomplished overnight--nor in a month. For it is not simply a logical choice between two alternative ways of understanding life, one of which is clearly more life-affirming. Rather, it involves reconstructing oneself from the inside out, by changing--or resignifying--the symbols and language by which one has named one's world and survived to the present moment. Which means overcoming the fear of the unknown, which is ultimately the fear of death. Making such changes is

difficult at best, and requires a willingness to risk and to trust that what lies in and beyond the unknown will be worth it in the end.

My project is offered in the hope that it will be a starting point for reflection, dialogue, and change in congregations seeking to offer gospel wholeness to themselves, and to a broken world crying out for such wholeness. To that end, I have written not for an academic audience, but for the person in the pew who is concerned about the future of the church and its faithfulness to the gospel.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the summer of 1992, the Democratic Party nominated two members of the Baby Boom Generation as candidates for President and Vice President of the United States; the Republican Party, at its national convention, invited the United States to divide itself against itself through the rhetoric of hate and exclusion; and Baby Boomers came back to my congregation.

Are all these events related? At first glance, no, they probably are not. And yet, one wonders at the curious juxtaposition, especially since we know now that the country elected the Baby Boomer ticket, who ran on a platform of openness and hope, rather than the Republican ticket, headed by a World War II hero who castigated the Democratic presidential candidate for his non-existent Viet Nam War record. The two parties presented diametrically opposed world-views, and the country chose the world-view of openness, rather than the world-view that suggested societally-imposed categories of "hero-ness" are the things that matter in a President.

But what about the Baby Boomers who came back to my congregation that summer? Generally, as I look out each Sunday morning across the congregation I pastor, I see the faces of the saints-- those persons who have struggled through years of feast and famine to build and maintain a portion of the Body of Christ. I see graying hair, painful joints, eyes that don't see as well, and ears that don't hear as well as they used to. I see persons who, in spite of their infirmities, make a commitment to be

in church every Sunday morning because if they weren't there, "It just wouldn't feel right, and the rest of the week would be all wrong, too."

Until the summer of 1992, however, those whom I hadn't seen in any numbers were persons my own age, those of us called the "Baby Boom Generation," born in the years 1946-1964. Seventy-seven million babies were born in the United States during that period, nearly one-third of all Americans.¹ But even with several new Baby Boomer families attending my congregation, they still are not represented in the same proportion in which Baby Boomers are represented in the population as a whole. And so I ask the question which seems to have captured the imagination of the church at large: "Why aren't Baby Boomers in Church?"¹

To ask it another way, I wonder why I am in church. What was it about the way in which I grew up in the church that allows me to continue to find meaning and value in the liturgy, in the scriptures, even in the organizational structure of the church, when the majority of persons in my generation do not? Am I simply a fluke, or is there something in my experience that could point the church in a direction that would enable it to reach other Baby Boomers?

¹ United Methodist Church, General Board of Discipleship, Reaching for the Baby Boom Generation (Nashville: General Board of Discipleship, 1989), 7-8.

² See for example Tex Sample, U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990); Cheryl Russell, 100 Predictions for the Baby Boom Generation: The Next 50 Years (New York: Plenum Press, 1987); Paul C. Light, Baby Boomers (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990); William Easum, How to Reach Baby Boomers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); and Craig Kennet Miller, Baby Boomer Spirituality: Ten Essential Values of a Generation (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992). See also Craig Miller's Encounters With Jesus: A Group Study in Baby Boomer Spirituality (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992).

I think there is something in my experience that can be helpful to the church as it seeks to reach Baby Boomers. The Methodist--and later, United Methodist--congregation in which I grew up gave me a strong foundation in biblical studies, presented in an atmosphere in which critical reflection on the text was encouraged and affirmed. It allowed me--encouraged me, even--to assume a variety of leadership positions, to take responsibility for important events, to participate fully in the whole life of the church, even though I was young and a woman. The unspoken message I received was that I, too, was created in the divine image; that the Christian life was a life of freedom and possibility rather than limits and boundaries; that scripture, tradition, experience and reason were all equally important when "doing" theology; and that I needed to discover for myself how best to steward the gifts and graces I received from God--I didn't need to fit into someone else's idea or plan for me.

Out of my experience, honed by my academic work, comes this project. The reader may groaningly ask, "Why another study on how the church can reach the Baby Boomers?" The answer is because the way in which I look at the problem seems to speak to my fellow "Boomers" with whom I have shared my ideas in a way that many of the other suggestions do not. So if nothing else, what I suggest here may shed some light on why many Boomers are not in church--and why some struggle to stay. Hopefully, it also will provide an opportunity for reflection and discussion by persons of all ages who are currently in the church on how to reach persons who are outside it, as well as give suggestions on how the church can live authentically and responsively in a pluralistic world.

The Shape of the Project

There are, of course, some Baby Boomers who do attend church now. But as almost anyone in a traditional mainline congregation will tell you, they seem to be attending in greater numbers "down the street--at the conservative/non-denominational church. What are they doing that we're not?" Tex Sample, in his book U.S. Lifestyles and the Mainline Churches, suggests that there are actually three segments to the Baby Boomers (and to American culture in general): the cultural right, the cultural left, and the cultural middle. He further suggests that those conservative congregations that attract Baby Boomers in significant numbers tend to draw them from the cultural right, while the segment of Baby Boomers most clearly missing from the mainline churches are those on the cultural left.³

My hunch is that the reason many Baby Boomers from the cultural left are not in church is that their world-view is different from the one proclaimed from the pulpit and lived from the pews each Sunday morning in many of our churches. One reason for this difference in world-view is the difference in life experience of the Baby Boomers and those pre-Baby Boomers who make up the majority of the present membership of the mainline Protestant denominations.⁴ In his book, Sample explores the sociological and cultural aspects of this generational difference; I highlight and explore his work in more detail in Chapter 2, consider what insights can be gained about why cultural left Baby Boomers aren't in

³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 4-5.

⁴ Princeton Religion Research Center, Religion in America 1990 (Princeton: Princeton Religion Research Center, 1990), 34-38.

church, and how addressing the issue of world-view might be a way to open the church to them.

One way to illuminate the church's world-view is by studying scripture, which most Christian churches claim as their foundation document. But I suspect that Jesus' world-view, made visible in his encounters with six different women in the gospels, more closely reflects the world-view of cultural left Baby Boomers than that of the persons who currently make up church membership. In Chapter 3, I explore these six encounters using Helen Bruch Pearson's book, Do What You Have The Power To Do: Studies of Six New Testament Women. I then describe what can be gleaned about Jesus' world-view from these encounters, and consider whether his world-view matches that of the Baby Boomers.

In Chapter 4 I look at implications for the church if, in fact, Jesus' world-view does reflect more closely that of the Baby Boom Generation than its current membership. I explore how one goes about changing one's world-view by comparing two texts for the sacrament of the Lord' Supper from the United Methodist Church, and then reflect on the importance of language and liturgy in shaping the church's world-view. In Chapter 5 I continue my exploration by considering Burton L. Mack's "Gap Theory of Preaching" as a possible way to bridge the gap between the world-views of Baby Boomers and pre-Baby Boomers.

What World Do You See?

A key concept for this project is that of "world-view," outlined by Jonathan Z. Smith, an historian of religions, in his essay entitled "The

Influence of Symbols Upon Social Change."⁵ Smith suggests that "the place on which one stands," and how the world looks from that place, determines how an individual or culture understands the cosmos (world) to be organized, the place of the individual within the cosmos, and, consequently, how one structures social and personal relationships in such a cosmos.⁶ With Smith, I am suggesting that there are two basic world-views: one that understands the horizon as a boundary beyond which lies chaos; another that understands the horizon as a point of departure for the further exploration of possibilities and potential.

The Bounded World-view

The first world-view Smith describes sees the cosmos with boundaries and limits beyond which lies chaos:

This locative vision of man [sic] and the cosmos is revealed in a variety of descriptions of the places in which men [sic] may stand. The world is perceived as a bounded world; focusing on the etymological roots, the world is an environ-ment, an ambiance. That which is open, that which is boundless is seen as the chaotic, the demonic, the threatening.⁷

Order in this world-view is something won by the gods, who place limits on chaos by creating a place and a function for all the elements of the cosmos. In Genesis 1, for example, God creates order out of the chaotic, formless void of the earth and the darkness covering the face of the deep by speaking the word, "Let there be light" (Gen.1:1-3). For the next five days, God continues to create more and more order out of chaos,

⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Influence of Symbols Upon Social Change," in Map Is Not Territory (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 129-46.

⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁷ Ibid., 134.

until on the last day, as the final act of creation, God creates human beings and gives them very specific responsibilities within the cosmos:

God said to them,
 "Be fruitful and multiply,
 and fill the earth and subdue it;
 and have dominion over the fish of the sea
 and over the birds of the air
 and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."⁸

Human beings are thus located within the cosmos and given a place on which to stand. In other words, they are enjoined to live out their role in maintaining the cosmic order, which this passage from Genesis identifies as fruitfulness, subjugation, and domination. By fulfilling their role in the created order, human beings harmonize themselves with "the great rhythms of cosmic destiny and order."⁹ The advantage of such a world-view is that in it everyone knows her or his place, which gives meaning to life. Maintaining one's place within the cosmic order provides the individual with an opportunity for social responsibility and gives one value in that order, for if one were to step out of place, the cosmic order would be destroyed.¹⁰ This importance of place applies to the lowliest member of society as well as to the well-to-do and to the sovereign.

What are some of the ways in which "place" is determined and maintained? In other words, how does one draw the boundaries which allow me to know whether I am in place?

⁸ Gen. 1:28.

⁹ J. Z. Smith, 133.

¹⁰ Ibid., 137-38.

One way is by determining a hierarchy of values for social roles. In a patriarchal society, for example, men have more value than women, and so men's place is to be superior to women (usually interpreted as dominating them), while women's place is to be inferior (and thus subordinate to men). A hierarchy of authority and leadership roles follows from such valuing, in which men have more authority than women and therefore are in more positions of power and leadership.

Another way is by establishing proper roles based on gender. For instance, a society may decide that a woman's place is at home raising children, while a man's place is working to support the family at a job outside the home. Thus, "wife" and "mother" are proper roles for women, while "provider" is a proper role for men in such a society.

Race and ethnicity may also be a way to determine place, as may socio-economic status. One's occupation may serve as a placemaker, if one's society values certain professions more highly than others. And the way in which sexual relationships are conducted may be a place issue, especially depending on how lineage is determined (through the mother or through the father), and whether children and spouses are understood to be property, or individuals with their own rights and privileges.

A society that operates from a bounded world-view will define carefully what roles its members are expected to play in the areas of gender, sexuality, purity (who and what is "clean" and "unclean"), and authority. In the Hebrew scriptures, the entire book of Leviticus, for example, deals with matters of place. From sacrifices to sexual relations, from food that is clean to food that is unclean, from diseases to

blasphemy, Leviticus outlines carefully, and in great detail, where the boundaries of Hebrew society are to be placed.

It is only through such careful definition as that exhibited in the book of Leviticus that persons with a bounded world-view know that they are in place--and not just in place, but in the right place. If they do not know where their place is, the cosmic order is threatened with collapse. The paradox is that sometimes definitions are implicit rather than explicit, so that it is only when one steps out of place, when one crosses a boundary, that one discovers what those definitions are--and what price one will pay for threatening the cosmic order.¹¹

The Open World-view

In the second world-view, the structured cosmic order with its roles, boundaries and limits has become oppressive rather than freeing, suffocating rather than meaningful:

The structures of order are perceived to have been reversed. Rather than the positive limits they were meant to be, they have become oppressive. Man [sic] is no longer defined by the degree to which he [sic] harmonizes himself [sic] and his [sic] society to the cosmic patterns of order; but rather by the degree to which he [sic] can escape the patterns.¹²

In this world-view, crossing boundaries, stepping outside of societally-imposed roles and creating one's own understanding of self and purpose is what is valued. Discovering what lies beyond the horizon

¹¹ For additional information on how cultures determine boundaries see Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); Bruce J. Malina, Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986); and Jerome H. Neyrey, Paul, In Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), especially 11-20. Malina and Neyrey apply Douglas' work to New Testament texts and concerns.

¹² J. Z. Smith, 139.

becomes the goal: "The [person] of wisdom is no longer the sage [who knows which places belong to whom] but the savior--he [sic] who knows the escape routes."¹³ Smith's naming of the one who knows the escape routes as "savior"--she or he who is willing to cross boundaries without fear that the cosmic order will come crashing down, thereby showing others that such fear is groundless--is an interesting choice of language, given the thrust of this project. When looking at Jesus' encounters with women in seeking to determine his world-view, the question will be "Will he cross boundaries without fear that the cosmic order will come crashing down?"

In the open world-view, freedom is the ultimate value. Each person has the opportunity to choose her or his own path, to make decisions about who to be and what to do without society dictating the directions such decisions should take. "Shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," "oughts" and "musts" are not part of this world-view's language except as foils over against which "can" and "may"-- the language of possibility-- have become the order of the day. For persons brought up with a bounded world-view, this freedom may seem too easy, without enough duty and obligation to keep one in one's place. But the freedom of this second world-view is actually more difficult, for one must take responsibility for one's own actions. There is no one else to say "This is what you must do," no one else to blame for being in the wrong place (role, etc.). Each individual is responsible for determining her or his own place on which to stand.

Is it possible to have a world totally without boundaries? Smith says no, that the end goal of this second world-view is actually to

¹³ Ibid., 139.

return "to the world-beyond-this-world which is [humanity's] true place."¹⁴ He thus seems to believe that even in this open world-view it is impossible not to have some "place" in mind, even though one strives to reach it by crossing the boundaries imposed by a limiting society; in this world-view, one is still looking for a utopian set of boundaries and roles. In other words, Smith seems to opt for a locative vision even within his supposedly "open" world-view.

I would like to suggest, however, that the value of this second world-view lies in its very boundedlessness, which means that it is a world-view disposed to handle difference with ease and grace. In the multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-religious reality that is American society in the 1990s and beyond, a world-view that accepts and welcomes diversity is critically important for lessening tension between majority and minority groups, and for developing a new definition of "American." In this situation, the important feature of the open world-view is its expectation that boundaries will be crossed or transcended.

For Smith to opt for a locative vision within his open world-view suggests that it is probably necessary to have some boundaries, so that one can account for difference. And it raises the possibility that there may be a spectrum of world-views, ranging from the very bounded to the very open. The open and the closed world-views, in the pure forms that are described here, can be understood as opposite poles along that spectrum of world-views. These two poles serve as the counterpoint for the argument of this project; in the interest of clarity I will refer primarily to the purely open or bounded world-view throughout the

¹⁴ Ibid., 140.

project. However, I invite the reader to keep the world-view spectrum in mind, and to use her or his own experience to suggest degrees of openness and boundedness.

Two World-views, One World?

The issue, then, for our two world-view models, is where and how does one draw the lines--the boundaries that give me, and you as other, our places on which to stand? And if the boundaries are drawn in one way, does that mean they cannot be drawn in the other? Smith is careful to note that the bounded and open world-views are not evolutions; one does not move from "the closed world to the infinite universe."¹⁵ Nor can the bounded world-view be equated with primitive, archaic society and the open with the modern.¹⁶ Instead, the two world-views often coexist simultaneously among different groups within a single society. Smith identifies, for example, the difference in world-view between cowboys and homesteaders in the United States during the nineteenth century, "the one with his cry of 'Ride on' and 'Don't fence me in,' the other with his barbed wire and language of roots."¹⁷ Thus, it is not too surprising that Baby Boomers and pre-Baby Boomers have differing world-views, nor that there are differing world-views within the Baby Boom Generation itself.

The Importance of World-view for Social Change

What is the importance of world-view? Why is it important to know how one views the place on which one stands? As was noted above, one's

¹⁵ J. Z. Smith, 132.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 141.

world-view affects what values and activities are important to the individual and/or culture. It affects how interpersonal relationships are structured, especially in terms of power and authority. It affects how one sees the "other." Ultimately, it affects one's identity. But not only an individual's cosmos is affected. Smith suggests that a culture's choice of either an open world-view or a bounded world-view is the determining factor in how its society will be constructed.

The question of the character of the place on which one stands is the fundamental symbolic and social question. Once an individual or culture has expressed its vision of its place, a whole language of symbols and social structures will follow.¹⁸

Smith notes another critical function of world-view: changing it is one of the most effective ways to enact social change, for "social change is preeminently symbol or symbolic change."¹⁹ He continues

At the heart of the issue of change are the symbolic-social questions: what is the place on which I stand? what are my horizons? what are my limits? when one adopts one or the other of these two basic stances, one adopts a whole symbolic universe which is, for the individual or culture, the Universe. To change stance is to totally alter one's symbols and inhabit a different world.²⁰

That last sentence is at the heart of what this project is about. How does one change stance? How does one go about altering one's symbols so that another world is created? Must new symbols be created, or is it enough simply to resignify already existing ones?

This project suggests that resignifying already existing symbols is more helpful in effecting change than creating an entire new symbol

¹⁸ J. Z. Smith, 141.

¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

²⁰ Ibid.

system. Resignification allows those who are experiencing change to feel as if they still have some landmarks, even if those landmarks point in new directions.¹¹ In addition, new symbols are most effective when they come out of a group experience; when they are imposed from the top down it takes a much longer time for them to take on real meaning for group members (if they ever do).

The current movement in feminist circles--in biblical studies, theology, archeology and anthropology, to name just a few disciplines--toward uncovering ways in which patriarchal societies and religions resignified the symbols of the Goddess religion to support their world-view is a case in point.¹² Riane Eisler gives a particularly compelling example in a discussion of the biblical Garden of Eden story in her book,

¹¹ Letty Russell, in her book Growth in Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), describes this disorientation as "future shock": "Future shock is maladjustment with the present because of the longed-for past. It is a particular disease of religious groups and of professional theologians because of their focus on past events and the content of tradition. Those who suffer from future shock become disoriented when change threatens their security. They seek to control their world and the view of the world by ordering it according to a set of static, already established answers. When the world and our relationships change (as they do at a sometimes frightening pace), future shock sets in because there is no flexibility to seek out new questions and new relationships" (pp. 30-31).

¹² See for example Marija A. Gimbutas, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe, 6500-3500 B.C. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Carol P. Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987); Naomi R. Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979); Norma Lorre Goodrich, Priestesses (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989); Christine Downing, The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1981); Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987); and Merlin Stone, When God Was a Woman (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest, 1976). For a literary treatment, see the novel by Barbara G. Walker, Amazon (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

The Chalice and the Blade.²³ The symbols she lifts up for consideration are the serpent, the tree of knowledge, and the woman. In the Goddess religion, the serpent was an oracular and prophetic symbol of the Goddess, and is one of the most frequent motifs found in archeological excavations of the Neolithic period.²⁴ The sacred Tree of Knowledge was also a symbol associated with the Goddess, while women priestesses were "the vehicle for divine wisdom and revelation."²⁵ The Garden of Eden story (Genesis 3), in which each of these symbols is turned on its head and resignified, makes a great deal more sense when one has this historical perspective in mind. Now the actors in the story, rather than being positive symbols, are perceived to be evil (the serpent), death-producing (the tree), and the cause of humanity's downfall (the woman). Eisler suggests that

the transformation of the ancient symbol of oracular wisdom into a symbol of satanic evil and the blaming of the woman for all the misfortunes of humanity were political expedients. They were deliberate reversals of reality as it had formerly been perceived.

Directed to the original audience of the Bible--the people of Canaan, who would still have remembered the terrible punishments inflicted on their ancestors by the men who brought with them the new gods of war and thunder--the horrible consequences of Eve's disobedience were more than just allegory about humanity's "sinfulness." They were a clear warning to avoid the still persistent worship of the Goddess.²⁶

²³ Riane Eisler, The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 88-89.

²⁴ Ibid., 86-88.

²⁵ Ibid., 88.

²⁶ Eisler, 89.

If Eisler's contention is true, that society during the Neolithic era was matrifocal rather than patriarchal, with a horizontal or "partnership" orientation to society rather than a vertical or "dominator" orientation,¹¹ then the success of the social change to patriarchal society during the Bronze Age, through the shifting of symbol systems and therefore world-view, is dramatic, to say the least. And Smith's statement that "to change stance is to totally alter one's symbols and to inhabit a different world" is proved to be true, given our experience of living in a patriarchal society based on the Garden of Eden story.

I address the importance of symbol change for social change more fully in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, as I look at ways in which the church might move toward an open world-view. And move I believe it must. First, it is what the gospel calls us to do. Secondly, it is a way that the church can become what it has claimed to be for twenty centuries: an open, inclusive community that welcomes persons of all races, genders, and classes. Thirdly, in our increasingly pluralistic society and world, it is a way to offer hospitality to our neighbors without requiring that they first become like us to be accepted by us. And finally, it is a way in which the church can open itself to persons--like the Baby Boomers--who are searching for the meaning and vision that the gospel provides.

¹¹ Ibid., xvii.

CHAPTER 2

Horizon as Beginning, Horizon as End: Baby Boomers and the Church

The United States is a country of many races, many classes, and many cultures. What is not often recognized is that there are different cultures within seemingly homogeneous groups--within a single ethnic group, for example, where the oldest generation may have been born and raised in the country of origin, while their children were born in the country of origin and raised in the United States, and the second generation's children were born and raised in the United States, with little or no experience of the country of origin.

The Baby Boom Generation, those persons born in the United States during the years 1946-1964, is such a sub-culture within the larger dominant culture.¹ By dominant culture I mean that culture which traditionally has been understood to be American: primarily White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant (often called WASP, for short). This is not to deny that there are persons within the dominant culture whose race and ethnicity is different, and whose religious perspective is other than Protestant. But by and large, mainstream American culture has been shaped and molded by persons--usually male--who are descended from Northern European Protestants who began coming to the eastern shores of this continent nearly 400 years ago.

Burton L. Mack suggests that the seven main roots of American culture are (1) Judeo-Christian tradition, (2) the Renaissance, (3) the

¹ Webster's defines "culture" as "5a: a particular stage of advancement in civilization b: the characteristic features of such a stage or state c: behavior typical of a group or class" (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary).

Enlightenment, (4) the German and English Romanticisms, (5) the American experience, (6) the American Dream, and (7) American Christianity.¹

Out of these roots come American cultural elements such as law, justice, humanism, the scientific perspective, rationalism, democracy, the "cultivation of personal and private desire,"² rugged individualism, manifest destiny, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of prosperity and happiness for all,"³ and the belief that because the United States is the ideal nation, it can and should provide help and assistance to the needy of the world.⁴ In many ways, the Baby Boom Generation exemplifies these cultural elements as has no other generation in American history. In particular, the cultivation of personal and private desire, the belief in life, liberty and the pursuit of prosperity and happiness for all, and humanism describe the characteristics by which the Boomers are frequently known.

This chapter explores why, and how Baby Boomers mesh--or, more frequently, do not mesh--with the pre-Baby Boomers who constitute the majority of the members of mainline congregations. Utilizing material developed by Tex Sample in his book U.S. Lifestyles and Mainline Churches: A Key to Reaching People in the 90's, I suggest with Sample that the basic difference between the two groups is a difference in

¹ Burton L. Mack, "The Gospel and the Gaps: A Worldly Theory of Preaching," photocopy, n.d., 15.

² Mack, "The Gospel," 15.

³ Mack, "The Gospel," 15.

⁴ Mack, "The Gospel," 15.

ethic.⁶ Ethic is here understood to mean "a theory or system of moral values."⁷ I then explore Sample's contention that further differences between Baby Boomers and pre-Baby Boomers occur as a result of an individual's location along a cultural spectrum of right, middle and left, with right, middle and left understood not as political positions but as lifestyle groupings.⁸ I conclude the chapter by considering the importance of addressing constructively the differences between Baby Boomers and current church members.

Two Ethics: Self-denial and Self-fulfillment

Perhaps the most striking difference between Baby Boomers and pre-Baby Boomers is one that can be identified as a difference in ethic--in the system of moral values used by each group. Using the work of Daniel Yankelovich,⁹ Sample describes the two ethics as self-denial and self-fulfillment. He suggests that pre-Baby Boomers live out of an ethic of self-denial, while many Baby Boomers live out of an ethic of self-fulfillment.¹⁰

Self-denial

The self-denial ethic is the one that has guided much of the dominant American culture for nearly two hundred years. Self-denial is grounded in Jesus' injunction to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and

⁶ For a full discussion see Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, chap. 1, 9-21.

⁷ See Webster's.

⁸ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 4.

⁹ See Daniel Yankelovich, New Rules: Searching for Self-fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down (New York: Random House, 1981).

¹⁰ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 11.

follow him on the road to eternal life (Mark 8:34-38 and parallels). Elements of the ethic include a willingness to deny oneself for the sake of the family's well-being, a recognition that one must work hard to provide for the necessities of life, and a quest for respectability, which includes having "a good home, . . . children who [are] well-behaved . . . [and the ability] to 'hold one's head up in the community.'"¹¹

Respectability is perhaps the most important element of the self-denial ethic, because it serves as a "compensative value" for the vast majority of persons who will never attain the primary goal of American society--making it to the top.¹² Respectability serves to offset "the sense of self-loss and failure one experience[s] when caught between achievement myths and social realities."¹³ In the terms of the bounded world-view model described in Chapter 1, if one fulfills the requirements of respectability, one is understood to be doing one's part to maintain the cosmic order. The individual knows what her or his place is: to have a good home, well-behaved children, and respect from one's peers in the community. Any deviation from this place threatens to bring the cosmos crashing down around one--literally. To lose respectability means the possibility of being shunned by friends and acquaintances; such a loss of relationship means the loss of the world that is constructed by those relationships.

¹¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 11, 13.

¹² Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 13.

¹³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 13.

Self-fulfillment

With the Baby Boom Generation, a new ethic became a part of the culture, born of the affluence of post-World War II America. For the first time it became possible for persons not to worry about the necessities of life; instead, they had time to pursue activities leading to the fulfillment of the self. The resulting ethic of self-fulfillment has four elements: (1) life is intrinsically valuable, (2) life should be expressive both creatively and emotionally, (3) one has a moral responsibility to fulfill the self, and (4) the psychology of affluence.¹⁴

If life is intrinsically valuable, then denial of any part of one's life for whatever reason--family, country, career, etc.--becomes inappropriate.¹⁵ A scriptural basis for this understanding comes from Jesus' statement that he had come so that his followers might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10); the quest for abundant life is a primary goal for persons living out of a self-fulfillment ethic. Where family, career, or country contribute to an abundant life, the self-fulfillment lifestyle incorporates them. One does not, however, raise a family, build a career, or serve one's country out of duty, obligation, or the expectations of society at large.

Closely allied to the understanding that life is intrinsically valuable is the belief that life should be emotionally and creatively expressive. The self-fulfillment ethic recognizes that it is healthier to be in touch with one's feelings and to express them appropriately,

¹⁴ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 15-17.

¹⁵ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 15.

rather than to repress or ignore them. And it calls into question the denial of one's hopes, dreams and aspirations for the sake of family and business that is sometimes required by the self-denial ethic. Baby Boomers witnessed such denial by their parents, and observed that their parents' lives were impoverished qualitatively.¹⁶ Baby Boomers experienced the roles their parents played--good provider, good family, respectable people, etc.--as oppressive and suffocating, rather than meaningful and freeing. To escape the structures of order imposed by society and say "Yes!" to their hopes and dreams thus became the goal of Baby Boomers.

The third element of the self-fulfillment ethic is the notion of the self.¹⁷ Although at its worst this element of self-fulfillment led to the excesses of the Me Generation in the 1970s and the Yuppie track of the 1980s, at its best the realization of the self enables each person--regardless of gender, race or class--to embody the divine image in which all human beings were created. When understood in this way, the fulfillment of the self becomes a moral responsibility, "not merely something one does in one's leisure."¹⁸ By living out one's possibilities and potentials, claiming and fulfilling the self helps to eliminate

¹⁶ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 16-17.

¹⁷ The notion of the self is treated as a separate element of the self-fulfillment ethic in Tex Sample, "Self-Denial and Self-Fulfillment," in Reaching for the Baby Boom Generation, 22. I have followed that pattern here.

¹⁸ Sample, "Self-Denial and Self-Fulfillment," 22.

the narcissistic rage that can lead to the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of oneself or others.¹⁹

The fourth element of the self-fulfillment ethic is the one that creates it and makes it possible: the psychology of affluence. The experience of growing up in the boom economy of post-World War II America led many Baby Boomers to believe that affluence is a right, rather than a privilege. That belief was supported by a second belief that the economy will always be able to provide the goods and services necessary for affluence, since it works automatically toward that end. Based on these two beliefs, persons who have been shaped by the psychology of affluence generally want more.²⁰ But the belief that one's economic needs would be taken care of also made it possible for Baby Boomers to explore aspects of living other than the need to put a roof over their heads and food on the table.

The world-view that grows out of the psychology of affluence is usually an open world-view. If money is no object, then many other barriers and limitations fall away as well. One can take classes to change careers, for example, so that one is not stuck in a mind-numbing job for forty years, with only a gold watch to look forward to at the end. Combined with the push toward self-fulfillment, the psychology of

¹⁹ "Narcissism" here refers to the psychological definition used, for example, by Alice Miller in her ground-breaking work The Drama of the Gifted Child (New York: Basic Books, 1981). The proliferation of Twelve Step programs of all sorts to deal with addictive behaviors during the last half of the 1980s is a case in point, as persons--led by Boomers--tried to deal with their (self) destructive behaviors.

²⁰ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 16. For a discussion of the hunger for more see Laurence Shames, The Hunger for More: Searching for Values in an Age of Greed (New York: Times Books, 1989).

affluence encourages one to cross social boundaries that hinder the realization of the ideal self. Persons living out of the psychology of affluence experience the horizon as the place beyond which lie possibilities as yet unexplored. The horizon is not the endpoint beyond which one cannot go, the limit on the other side of which lies the crumbling of the cosmic order.

Challenges to Self-fulfillment

The late 1980s brought several challenges to the self-fulfillment ethic. The first was the realization that self-fulfillment is not the same as self-indulgence. In fact, self-indulgence often destroys self-fulfillment by turning one so into oneself that it is impossible to maintain life-affirming relationships, and is the first step on the road to addictive behaviors. Consequently, two new characteristics have been incorporated into the self-fulfillment ethic: (1) the recognition of the need, and the search for deeper and more lasting life-affirming relationships, and (2) the desire to give oneself to a larger cause, "something important, something that count[s.]"¹¹

The second challenge comes from changes in the economic life of the United States. Douglas Walrath, in his book Frameworks: Patterns for Living and Believing Today, suggests that Boomers' experience of the psychology of affluence--that it matches economic reality or it does not--divides the Baby Boom Generation into two groups. He suggests, for example, that the oil crisis of the early 1970s challenged the psycholo-

¹¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 20.

gy of affluence, and shaped younger Boomers (those born after 1955) differently from those born in the first half of the generation.¹²

A further challenge to the psychology of affluence was the recession of 1990-92, which began as the Baby Boomers were beginning to turn 45 and confront mid-life issues and crises. A significant sign of this challenge was a shift in language made by President Clinton (born in the first year of the Baby Boom), from that of Candidate Clinton. In his inaugural address, President Clinton used the word "sacrifice"--a self-denial term used in the campaign by pre-Baby Boomer Ross Perot--for the first time in addressing the economic situation of the country. With that shift, sacrifice became the theme of the national discussion on how to reduce the national budget deficit.

If the psychology of affluence is challenged, is it likely that its accompanying open world-view will become more bounded? I don't believe so, because the other elements of the self-fulfillment ethic are still present. Rather, we will see new forms of self-fulfillment created--"Live simply, that others may simply live,"¹³ for example--forms that do not require as much affluence to make them possible.

Cultures Within the Culture

To the casual observer, it is clear that not all Baby Boomers understand the world in the same way. What accounts for differences within the Baby Boom Generation? As was noted in the previous section, Walrath believes it is how Baby Boomers experienced the psychology of

¹² Douglas Walrath, Frameworks: Patterns for Living and Believing Today (New York: Pilgrim Place, 1987), 38-49.

¹³ Seen on a bumper sticker recently.

affluence as they were growing up. Tex Sample, however, suggests that the difference between Boomers comes because of where they fall on a lifestyle spectrum he classifies as cultural left, middle and right.¹⁴ He observes that the cultural left members of the Baby Boom Generation, who most clearly embody the self-fulfillment ethic, generally come from affluent families who created for their children an environment in which the psychology of affluence flourished--regardless in which half of the Generation they were born.¹⁵

My own experience as someone born in 1957, after Walrath's divide, suggests that Sample is more correct. I grew up in an upper middle class family, and live out of the psychology of affluence (along with the reality that affluence is not always reachable); I am unquestionably a cultural left, self-fulfillment Baby Boomer. My experience also suggests another possibility to account for the difference in Baby Boomers. In observing myself and my siblings-- Boomers who cross Walrath's divide--as well as other Boomers, I see the Generation dividing chronologically into thirds. First third members, in my experience, tend to have some values left over from the self-denial ethic of the pre-Baby Boomers. Middle third Boomers (my own group) tend to have the most stereotypical Baby Boomer values, while last third Boomers, who experienced at a critical time in their lives the economic limitations identified by Walrath, seem to exhibit the "Calculator" mindset he describes.¹⁶ Because of my experience, I have chosen to focus on

¹⁴ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 4.

¹⁵ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 25-26.

¹⁶ Walrath, 38-49.

Sample's cultural spectrum, although an interesting topic for further research would be to explore both the chronological and cultural grids as ways to account for differences between Baby Boomers. An advantage of Sample's paradigm is that it is cross-generational, providing the means for exploring the differences between the target groups of this project.

The Cultural Left

Most of the 33 million persons on the cultural left are, according to Sample, Baby Boomers.¹¹ Persons on the cultural left embody most completely the ethic of self-fulfillment, and can be identified by three distinctive characteristics: they have a strong inner direction; they were reared in affluent families; and they have a "deep and abiding commitment to personal freedom and tolerance."¹²

The strong inner direction of Baby Boomers on the cultural left came from watching the conformist, outer-directedness of their parents as they were growing up.

Often they saw their parents working at jobs they didn't like, staying in marriages with spouses they did not love for the sake of the children, living in accord with community standards they did not actually agree with, and committing themselves to churches that were not finally compelling in their belief and action.¹³

In choosing not to follow in their parents' footsteps, Baby Boomers on the cultural left made a decision to listen to their own selves in making decisions about life, rather than society's "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," "oughts" and "musts." Consequently, things such as

¹¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 25.

¹² Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 25-26.

¹³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 25.

involvement in the community, family, and faith, which had been understood previously as obligations, are seen as options among which one can choose in order to create a life that is fulfilling and satisfying.³⁰

By choosing a different path from their parents, Baby Boomers on the cultural left constructed for themselves a world based on the assumption that the sky was the limit--and, with the moon landing in 1969, realized that not even the sky was the limit any longer. Therefore social pressures keeping one in place--in loveless marriages and unfulfilling jobs, e.g.--are ignored by cultural left Boomers in favor of life-affirming possibilities.

The second characteristic, that of being raised in affluent families, is essentially a requirement for the ethic of self-fulfillment. Historically a prerogative of the wealthy elite, the lifestyle rooted in the self-fulfillment ethic was made possible widely by the economic conditions of post-World War II America. The unprecedented number of children growing up in a condition of affluence enabled this lifestyle to become so widespread that it has become the driving cultural force of the last half of the twentieth century in the United States.

The cultural left's commitment to personal freedom and tolerance became visible through their personal dress and hairstyles, patterns of sexuality, family/household arrangements, the women's movement, reproductive freedom, and gay and lesbian lifestyles.³¹ The freedom to explore various possibilities in these areas was possible because of a

³⁰ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 25.

³¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 26.

willingness to tolerate difference, both in behavior and opinion: "other persons were free to pursue their individual wishes as long as these did not infringe on one's own freedom."¹² This tolerance of the cultural left is what so inflames persons on the cultural right, especially among the "Christian" right, who feel as if "someone [has] indeed changed the rules from the traditional values and conventional morality they had taken for granted until the late 60's and early 70's."¹³

The Cultural Right

Sample contends that persons on the cultural right are those individuals who most clearly live out of the self-denial ethic that characterizes persons born before the Baby Boom began in 1946. Economically, the cultural right tends to include the lower middle class, the working class, and the poor;¹⁴ their economic status encourages self-denial, since self-fulfillment often requires money for things beyond the necessities of life--and persons on the cultural right generally have to work hard just to afford the necessities.

¹² Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 26.

¹³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 26. The 1992 Republican National Convention, with its speeches by Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan, not to mention Marilyn Quayle and Barbara Bush, seemed to be an attempt to reinstate those values and rules in American culture. The attempt failed at the polls in November, when the Republican ticket was not elected. But the Los Angeles Times reported on December 30, 1992, that Pat Robertson "has settled on a new tack to counter the 'anti-God, anti-family' forces he believes are undermining America: He has organized a cadre of lawyers to supply free legal help to beleaguered Christians"; and, as the sub-headline notes, "It hasn't lost a case in two years." See Roy Rivenburg, "Litigating for a 'Godly Heritage,'" Los Angeles Times, 30 December 1992, E1.

¹⁴ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 59.

In sheer numbers, the cultural right is the largest segment of the cultural spectrum.³⁵ Persons from the cultural right tend to be locally oriented, deriving meaning and value from the neighborhood or community or small town in which they live.³⁶ Their local focus goes hand-in-hand with a more bounded world-view, for the horizon--the edge of the neighborhood, e.g.--serves as a barrier to unwanted outside influences.

Within the cultural right is a large subgroup, approximately 60 million adults, that Sample terms the "Respectables."³⁷ These are the persons for whom respectability is a compensative value, since they are unlikely to make it to the top of American society economically.³⁸ Instead, they find value and meaning by maintaining and upholding community standards of behavior, raising their children to do likewise, having a well-kept home, and supporting God and country. Self-denial describes their way of life, as they work hard to make ends meet and to provide for their children.

Respectables are those persons who make up the majority of the membership of the mainline churches according to Sample.³⁹ They are primarily pre-Baby Boomers, and therefore older adults. Their children, even when members of the Baby Boom Generation, may follow in their parents' footsteps as persons who live out of the self-denial ethic. It

³⁵ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 59.

³⁶ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 59.

³⁷ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 59-60.

³⁸ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 59.

³⁹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 60.

is these Baby Boomers who provide the burgeoning young adult membership for more conservative churches that espouse "traditional family values," values that resonate with the values taught to these Boomers by their parents. Respectables, whether Baby Boomers or pre-Boomers, are generally content with their lifestyle because they have made peace with its limitations. Consequently, the self-fulfillment lifestyle of the cultural left makes them confused, anxious, and sometimes angry.

Respectables are astounded by the lifestyles of the cultural left. They are either confused by it or consumed by anger against it. When Jerry Falwell attacked the "secular humanism" of the culture, he was reaching for a large group of Americans who want little to do with the inner-directed self-fulfillment lifestyles of many of today's young adults.⁴⁰

Respectables' confusion and anger over the lifestyle of the cultural left makes even more sense if the differences between the two groups is understood in terms of world-view. The confusion comes because the Respectables inhabit a different world from the cultural left. The symbols and language they use to construct their world are not the same: "should," "ought," and "must" shape the rules and place the boundaries by which Respectables live. Sample tells the story of a Baby Boomer who, when "told by his father that he should go to church, reacted immediately: 'Dad, don't should on yourself!'"⁴¹

The anger of the cultural right comes as a defensive response to the fear that their carefully constructed world, where everyone knows his or her place, is threatened with collapse. Who will they be, how will they know where they stand, if the world of the cultural left

⁴⁰ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 62.

⁴¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 32.

becomes the real world? As Letty Russell suggests, this fear can be understood as "future shock."

Those who suffer from future shock become disoriented when change threatens their security. They seek to control their world and the view of the world by ordering it according to a set of static, already established answers. When the world and our relationships change (as they do at a sometimes frightening pace), future shock sets in because there is no flexibility to seek out new questions and new relationships."

The Cultural Middle

The third segment of the cultural spectrum identified by Sample is that of the cultural middle. A dominant focus of members of this group is their careers, which sets them apart from both the cultural right and the cultural left. Members of the cultural right tend to be focused on the family and the community, while members of the cultural left tend to focus on fulfilling the self, sometimes at the expense of career."

Persons in the cultural middle are generally well-educated managers and professional people who are dedicated to achievement.

One's life is . . . profoundly future-oriented: planning for one's dreams, thinking about one's present job in terms of its options for promotion to another, putting off gratification in the present for the sake of long-term career achievement and gains. It is here [in the cultural middle] that most women translate their own goals and needs into those of their husband, sacrificing their own aspirations for his career."

²² Russell, 30-31.

²³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 101.

²⁴ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 101. In my experience, it is pre-Baby Boomer women from the cultural middle who are most resistant to me as a woman pastor; I suspect it is because I challenge their decision to sublimate their own dreams and career aspirations to those of their husbands.

Because of their education and occupational level, persons in the cultural middle tend to have a great deal more freedom and authority than persons on the cultural right to make decisions about their work, from when they will work to whether now is the time to consider making a job change. Sample notes that this kind of control over their lives results in good self-esteem and "psychological well-being" for members of the cultural middle.⁴⁶

One of the significant characteristics of the cultural middle, probably due to their sense of being in control of their lives, is a strong sense of individualism. This individualism takes two forms: utilitarian and expressive.⁴⁷ Utilitarian individualism is typical of parents of the Baby Boomers, who joined the fast-moving career tracks created by America's booming industrial economy following World War II. It focuses on "career, achievement, and advancement," sometimes to the exclusion of all else, using "the most efficient and direct means available."⁴⁸ This "tunnel-vision" approach to one's career means that other aspects of the self can atrophy as family and other creative expressions of the self are put aside in favor of career advancement. Negative side effects can include substance abuse, suicide, and family problems.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 101. I surmise that men in the cultural middle have good self-esteem, while their wives may not, since their goals are secondary to their husbands'.

⁴⁷ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 102.

⁴⁸ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 102.

⁴⁹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 102.

The second kind of individualism, which Sample terms "expressive," tends to be a response of Baby Boomers in the cultural middle to the excesses of utilitarian individualism they saw in their parents' lives.⁴⁰ Expressive individualism seeks to balance career achievement goals with self-fulfillment goals. The classic example of persons who live a life of expressive individualism are the "Yuppies," who symbolize the entire Baby Boom Generation for the media. In reality constituting only 4 to 6 percent of the generation, they struggle to walk the line between a good career and the "good life."⁴¹

The characteristic of individualism is reflected in how the cultural middle approaches its religious understanding. The experience of having their individual fate largely in their own hands is reflected in an understanding of faith that is "intensely personal."⁴¹ Even their understanding of sin is shaped by their individualism; rather than a condition, sin is a deed--the failure of the individual to act in accordance with God's will.

A code of right conduct necessarily follows from this approach, and righteousness becomes . . . an individualistic matter. . . . One is not so much redeemed from sin and guilt or estrangement from God as delivered from bad habits and evil desires that war against the divine command.⁴²

⁴⁰ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 102.

⁴¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 102.

⁴² Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 114. Sample relies heavily on H. Richard Niebuhr's book The Social Sources of Denominationalism (New York: Meridian Books, 1957) for his discussion of the religious experience of the cultural middle.

⁴³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 115.

Even the focus on work and career is reflected in the cultural middle's religious experience:

The life of faith is one of striving, of response to the dynamic will of God where one goes not in search of the fulfillment of a promise but in the completion of a task. It is a divinely ordained doing of God's will more than the acceptance of the justifying power of God's grace."³

This "divinely ordained doing of God's will" is what helps shape the boundedness of the cultural middle's world-view. Because of the cultural middle's tendency to have more freedom within their work situation than the cultural right, their world-view reflects less boundedness than that of the cultural right. It serves as an example of a world-view on the spectrum between the poles of boundedness and openness. However, there is still a clear perception within the world-view of the cultural middle that there are specific standards and behaviors that will move one to the top. Following those standards and living those behaviors help one to keep one's place, which is to keep moving up the ladder of success.

Lifestyles and the Church

Why be concerned about differences in lifestyles between the cultural left, right, and middle? The quick answer is to stop the membership decline in mainline churches, which will continue as older members of the cultural right age and die, if mainline churches are unable to reach Baby Boomers and others from the cultural left and left of middle. But it is more than a question of membership decline. It is also a matter of the purpose and vision of the church. What is the

³ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 115.

purpose of the church? What is its vision? How does it work with/in society to make that vision a reality?

How one answers those questions shapes how one views the importance of addressing differences in lifestyle--and world-view. If the purpose of the church is to make real and visible the reign of God in our time and place, then part of fulfilling that purpose requires affecting the social structures that make that reign visible through justice and mercy provided to all persons, regardless of gender, race, or class. Sample suggests that the responsibility for influencing the direction American culture takes in the future is precisely why mainline churches need to develop a willingness to welcome persons from other lifestyles.

What is at stake here is the direction of U.S. culture and the question of whether mainline churches will influence the shape of the future. In spite of all the publicity given to conservative and fundamentalist churches in recent years, they are not drawing any greater proportion of the population and are not reversing trends in the United States. In fact, it is extraordinarily unlikely that they can reach people at the front edge of cultural change. Mainline churches have a better chance to do so. . . . [W]ill mainline churches commit themselves to learning and responding to the diverse groups that make up this society?"⁴¹

Presumably the vision of the church is provided by the gospel, which commits one to a particular lifestyle and world-view. As Chapter 3 suggests, that lifestyle and world-view is one of openness, and celebrates diversity. To be true to this vision of gospel wholeness thus requires the question "How can the mainline churches learn to respond to the diverse groups that make up American society?" And there it might

⁴¹ Sample, U.S. Lifestyles, 5. Mainline churches who committed themselves to such a task would provide a Christian alternative to the messages the society receives from the Christian Right.

be that the church could learn something from the world-view of Baby Boomers on the cultural left. A more open world-view that appreciates, expects, and searches for difference would allow mainline churches to celebrate diversity as a gift of God, rather than as a problem to be avoided if at all possible. With a more open world-view, diversity could be sought as a sign of the real presence of God's reign in the midst of the church. Attracting Baby Boomers and others from the cultural left to mainline churches could thus be seen as a two-way process. Not only is it a matter of evangelizing the Baby Boomers; it is also a matter of converting the church!

How is it possible to open up a bounded world-view? The remaining chapters suggest three possible ways: through Bible study, through the liturgy, and through preaching.

CHAPTER 3

Living Beyond the Horizon: The World-View of Jesus

In the summer of 1992, I was invited to be the resource person for a United Methodist senior high church camp in Northern California. The camp's theme was "Heroes and Sheroes," a look at some of the women and men in the Bible who could serve as role models for the youth. In one of the sessions I looked at the encounters four unnamed women had with Jesus: The Bent-Over Woman, The Woman With A Hemorrhage, The Canaanite Woman, and the Woman At The Well. In these encounters, Jesus challenged his society's prevailing understanding of the way things were supposed to be done; in one instance, Jesus' own understanding seemed to be challenged. To my surprise, I discovered that these stories about Jesus also challenged the youth's understanding of the ways things were supposed to be done. I realized that I had stumbled on to--or been led by the Holy Spirit to--those very texts that provide a glimpse into the gospel communities' memory of Jesus' world-view. So the stories of Jesus' encounters with these four women, in addition to his encounters with The Woman Taken in Adultery and The Woman Who Anointed Jesus, form the basis of the discussion of this chapter.

Why use these particular stories? In large part, because of my experience of the youth's reaction to them. Their reaction to the stories and my exegesis of them indicated clearly that something deeper was going on than I had imagined when I chose the women as role models. The youth were not simply reacting to different gender roles. Could it be that what they expected the stories to say about these women was part

and parcel of a larger world-view, a world-view whose boundaries were challenged by what Jesus did in the stories?

As I reflected on why the youth reacted so negatively to these stories, it occurred to me that much of the church lives out of a world-view similar to the one described in the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus). It is a bounded world-view in which persons are given specific roles to play and rules to follow, so that the cosmic order is not threatened. Women, for example, are expected to be silent and learn submissively in the world-view of the Pastorals; they are not to teach or have authority over men, "for Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."¹ Women are then told that they will be saved through child-bearing--after all, was not the curse imposed on Eve for her transgression related to childbearing, as well as that her husband would rule over her?² In this world-view, women's roles are wife and mother, not teacher, preacher or leader.

And yet these last three roles are the very roles Jesus affirms for women in the stories that formed the basis of that camp session. My very presence as the camp resource person--an ordained minister with responsibility for teaching, preaching and leading--called into question the world-view described in the Pastorals. The youth reacted both to the stories and to me, suggesting that as a "ragin [sic] feminist"³ I should keep my views to myself--even though all I did was to tell the

¹ 1 Tim. 2:13-14.

² See Gen. 3:16.

³ The quote is from an anonymous camp evaluation form.

stories of these women from the gospels! The camp staff, on the other hand, reacted positively to the stories, glad to hear finally that there are places in scripture where women are treated as full human beings made in the divine image, with minds as well as bodies and emotions.

Experiencing both these negative and positive reactions to the stories while at camp suggested to me that the world-view of the gospels is quite different from that of the Pastoral Epistles--and of the church. The church generally does not live out of the world-view of the gospels, which have much looser boundaries than the Pastorals, and in which Jesus often challenges or crosses social boundaries, rather than maintains them. Instead, the church seems to feel more comfortable with a world-view in which persons are clear about how they fit into the cosmic order. The irony is that if you were to ask the average church member "Whose world-view does your congregation subscribe to?" she or he would probably answer, "Why, Jesus' world-view, of course." In looking at ways in which the church can open itself to Baby Boomers, therefore, it became apparent to me that uncovering the world-view of gospel stories such as the stories of these six women is a tool for shifting a congregation's world-view to one of openness. Making such a shift becomes much easier and less traumatic if persons can be shown the openness of Jesus' own world-view.

There is another reason for telling the stories of these six women: because the six women are unnamed. In a way, what they tell us about Jesus speaks even more loudly because the women were not deemed important enough to be called by name. What they tell us often has been silenced by centuries of church tradition and practice in which their

stories have not been told. Their stories have not been told because they are dangerous; they challenge the very foundations of Christian patriarchy outlined so clearly in 1 Timothy. Challenging Christian patriarchy and the civilization it has created is more than just a feminist or woman's issue, however. Challenging patriarchy is necessary if God's vision of a community in which "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female" (Gal. 3:28) is to become a reality, for racism, classism, and sexism cannot be eliminated until the underlying hierarchical system which requires that some categories of persons be understood as better than others is eliminated as well.

So, let us explore the stories of these unnamed women: The Bent-Over Woman⁴ (Luke 13:10-17); The Woman with a Hemorrhage (Mark 5:24b-34); The Woman Caught in Adultery (John 8:2-11); The Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42); The Woman Who Anointed Jesus (Mark 14:3-9); and The Canaanite Woman (Matt. 15:21-28). At least one story comes from each of the four gospels. Because these stories come from all four gospels, the consistency with which Jesus deals with the women is even more striking. It suggests that what the stories tell us is something so central about the Christian community's deep memory of who Jesus was that the gospel writers could not afford to leave these stories out of their characterizations of Jesus.⁵ Because they are stories about women, they

⁴ Because these women have no names, I have chosen to capitalize the descriptions which have served to identify them over the years.

⁵ However, I do recognize that each author has probably shaped the story to fit the theological agenda of the gospel. By and large, I have chosen to take each story on its own merit, without addressing its place or function within the larger gospel narrative. To do so adequately

intensify Jesus' boundary crossings--whether or not they are patriarchal boundaries--for it is not just another story of a healing, but the healing of a woman, not just a story about breaking sabbath rest, but doing so for a woman, not just a story about a clever reply, but a woman's clever reply. Especially as we look back at these stories from the perspective of nineteen centuries of living in a world constructed by the bounded, patriarchal world-view of the Pastoral Epistles, these stories remind us of the sense of freedom the earliest disciples must have felt in the presence of Jesus.

It is impossible, of course, to determine the historical Jesus' world-view precisely. The "Life of Jesus" presented in each of the gospels represents four different communities' attempts to explain who they believed Jesus of Nazareth to be, and what they thought it meant to be his follower in a particular time and place. They are not historical accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, as we understand the term historical. Rather, each gospel writer constructs a literary figure named Jesus whose story is told to illuminate and answer questions of faith important to the writer's community. It is impossible, within the scope of this project, to detail the different agendas each gospel writer brings to the task of describing Jesus' life and ministry, although the reader is invited to read the gospels and consider that question for her- or himself. Nor is it possible to unpack the many different nuances involved when more than one gospel writer describes the same

would require a complete project on the subject matter of this chapter alone.

encounter between Jesus and one of these women. Such a task must be left for another time and place.

A word about my approach. I have tended to be more sermonic than exegetical in my treatment of each story, as a way to evoke the reader's imagination and understanding. In doing so, I follow a generally feminist approach to biblical interpretation which attempts to read between the lines, to recreate the possible scene and tell the whole story, rather than the limited details that are given in the biblical text. Within the gap between the actual text and my description, I have tried to maintain the integrity of the underlying exegesis.⁶ And now, the stories of these unnamed women.

The Bent-Over Woman

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent-over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and

⁶ Helen Bruch Pearson uses the same approach in Do What You Have the Power to Do: Studies of Six New Testament Women (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1992), 11. Her analysis was invaluable in spurring my imagination. Her agenda in using these six stories is primarily to raise issues that challenge the patriarchal assumptions of our day and age.

the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.¹

Jesus has come, as was his custom, to the synagogue on the sabbath. He has been invited to teach; perhaps the ruler of the synagogue thought it would reflect honor on him to have this famous itinerant preacher speak in his synagogue on the sabbath. With news of the special visitor, the synagogue is crowded; both men and women fill their respective places in the gathering. As Jesus is teaching, he sees the figure of a woman crippled and bent-over; she has quietly entered after everyone else, so that she can hear the stranger, but not disturb anyone by her presence. For in her society, her condition is believed to be proof that she has disobeyed the will of God, who is punishing her by visiting upon her "a spirit that has crippled her for eighteen years." According to the beliefs of her people, she apparently refuses to repent of her sin and live in accordance with the laws of God; if she had repented, she would be healed of her condition.² For eighteen years she has lived on the margins of her community, virtually invisible because of her ailment.

But Jesus looks up, sees her, interrupts his teaching, and calls her to him—making her suddenly visible to everyone in the synagogue. By speaking to her, Jesus has crossed the boundary which said men do not acknowledge women's presence in public; they certainly do not speak directly to them, or stop teaching for them. He tells her she is set free from her infirmity (notice, the text does not read "healed"), and

¹ Luke 13:10-17.

² Pearson, 58.

then he lays his hands on her, and helps her to stand up straight and look someone in the eye directly for the first time in eighteen years.⁹

The synagogue ruler is incensed; Jesus has broken the fourth commandment, to "remember the sabbath and keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8). This commandment, unlike many of the other ten, is fleshed out by explaining what it means to keep the sabbath holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a day of sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.¹⁰

The Deuteronomic version of the commandment (Deut 5:12-15) grounds the commandment not in the creation but in the Exodus.

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.¹¹

The crowd in the synagogue would probably have held both understandings of the commandment in their minds; Jesus uses that knowledge as he responds to the synagogue leader. He reminds the leader that the commandment specifies who should rest--including the work animals which, as Jesus states, are untied so that they may be watered. But the commandment also specifies that servants--both male and female--and sons and daughters are not to work. The order in which these three categories are listed is: (1) sons and daughters; (2) servants; and (3) ani-

⁹ Pearson, 56, 61-62.

¹⁰ Exod. 20:9-11.

¹¹ Deut. 5:15.

mals, which implies a hierarchy of importance. Jesus speaks first about the category that is lowest on the list (animals), and then names the woman as a "daughter of Abraham"--which brings to mind that category which is given importance of place, sons and daughters. In his statement, Jesus adds an additional category from the commandment: "you." The commandment says, "you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter" By naming the woman Abraham's daughter, Jesus gives the woman even more prominence, establishing her place as a child of the covenant along with everyone else in the synagogue.

Jesus here uses the rhetorical device of arguing from that which is less than to that which is more than. His hearers, used to such a style of speech, would find themselves needing to agree with his second point (that the woman should be freed) if they had agreed with his first point that the commandment allowed for the animals to be freed.¹² The Jesus of the text assumes that the synagogue leader and the people know that the Deuteronomic version of the commandment understands rest from work as including freedom from bondage; he reminds them of it by using the language of freedom, rather than that of "curing" used by the synagogue ruler.

¹² See Burton L. Mack, Rhetoric and the New Testament (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 40. The story of the Bent-Over Woman follows the rhetorical pattern of an elaborated chreia. A chreia is a short anecdote that is expanded in a stylized way to prove a point. In this case, the argument would go like this: Narrative: Healing on the sabbath (v. 10-13); Issue: It is not lawful (v.14); Argument (rebuttal): Citation: Scriptural commandment using Deut. tradition of the Exodus=freedom from bondage (v. 14b); Example: ox and donkey (v. 15); Analogy: (less than to more than) so also the woman/daughter of Abraham (v. 16a); Maxim: The woman should be freed, especially on the sabbath (the sabbath is made for people) (v. 16b) Conclusion: Jesus is Lord (v.15) of the sabbath (v.17). See Mack, chaps. 2-3, 25-92, for more details.

By having the other version of the commandment in mind as well, Jesus reminds his hearers that sabbath rest is worked into the very fabric of creation. "God's sovereignty is so sure that even God can ease off the daily management of creation and the world will not fall apart."¹³ Consequently, it is possible to interpret the commandment in a less strict way without fear that the cosmic order will come crashing down around them. In regard to the woman, Jesus' hearers are reminded that on the sixth day of creation God created human beings--male and female human beings--in the divine image, and called them "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Even this woman, misshapen and bent-over as she is, is created in the divine image, and in God's eyes is very good; she, too, deserves to experience the full rest and liberation that God has worked into the fabric of creation.

What does this story say about Jesus' world-view, and what does that mean today? First, the story shows that he is willing to challenge the strict legalism of his culture in order to enable life to be more humanizing for the persons who have been bound up by that legalism.¹⁴

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 91. On the two versions of the commandment, Brueggemann notes, "The two motivations, creation in Exodus 20 and liberation in Deuteronomy 5, hold together the ordered life of God and the just intent of human life. To keep Sabbath is to engage in an activity that holds together, sacramentally, the life of God at rest and the life of the world in liberation" (p. 92). His entire chapter on this subject is well worth reading (pp. 79-110).

¹⁴ Jane Schaberg reminds us that the picture of restrictive Judaism depicted in the gospels is not born out by recent research, especially where women are concerned: "Inscriptions, papyri, and archeological data as well as literary sources indicate that there was great diversity. Some Jewish women were leaders in synagogues, were financially independent landowners and businesswomen, and acquired religious education, even devoting their lives to the study of Torah. Others were legally disadvantaged and powerless. The comparative situation of women

The Jesus in this story thus challenges the strict legalism of any "Christian" culture that binds persons because of their gender, class, or physical condition. He challenges our society's response to persons with AIDS, for example, especially the response of those persons who have claimed the disease is God's punishment (on gay men). That kind of societal response is the very one from which Jesus freed The Bent-Over Woman.

Secondly, the story reveals that liberation is a key element of Jesus' world-view. Jesus' liberation of The Bent-Over Woman is the embodiment of his claim in the synagogue at Nazareth that "The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . . to let the oppressed go free."¹⁵ From this story we gain an understanding of the range of oppression from which Jesus has come to proclaim release.

in ancient Judaism and early Christianity is not yet clear, but it is clear enough that no simple contrast favoring Christianity can be drawn. . . . [Luke's] capitulation . . . is more to repressive forces within the Roman Empire than to forces within Judaism." See Schaberg, "Luke," in The Women's Bible Commentary, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 279. She suggests further that Luke's depiction of women in primarily serving and nurturing roles served to support the wider (Imperial) culture's view of women, rather than the radical leadership and authority roles that some of the other gospels portray as a part of early Christianity. Luke, for example, omits the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman from the Markan material he uses; his depiction of Martha and Mary shows them in a serving role (Martha) and in a submissive role (Mary is learning in silence, as 1 Tim. 2:12 enjoins), rather than in the roles of theological witness (Martha) and anointer of the Messiah (Mary) in which the author of John portrays them (Schaberg, 279). Regardless of Luke's intent, the story of The Bent-Over Woman serves as a critique of Christian patriarchy.

¹⁵ Luke 4:18.

Thirdly, the story is a reminder that God has woven sabbath rest into the very fabric of creation. Sabbath rest therefore cannot be experienced fully by anyone until everyone--and all of creation--is freed from oppression in all its subtle, and not so subtle forms.¹⁶ The Jesus of this story is willing to challenge the boundaries that keep people in place by speaking to the woman publicly, by calling her out from the place where her society put her because of her gender. In making her visible to those gathered in the synagogue, Jesus invites us to make visible those persons who are marginalized by our society's boundaries of place. By touching her, he reminds us that it takes personal, physical, hands-on involvement to cross those boundaries and liberate persons and all creation from oppression.

The Woman With a Hemorrhage

And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."¹⁷

¹⁶ Pearson, 60.

¹⁷ Mark 5:24b-34.

She is desperate; she is alone. For twelve years she has been without human contact, for her ongoing flow of menstrual blood makes her ritually unclean. The book of Leviticus specified:

If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. Every bed on which she lies during all the days of her discharge shall be treated as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. Whoever touches these things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. If she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count seven days, and after that she shall be clean. On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest to the entrance of the tent of meeting. The priest shall offer one for a sin offering (emphasis mine) and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement (emphasis mine) on her behalf before the LORD for her unclean discharge.¹⁴

For twelve years, anything she touched, anyone she touched, became unclean as well. If she had a husband, the story says nothing about him. I imagine that, as the years went along, fewer and fewer people came to visit her, for they would become unclean if they sat in her chairs or touched anything that she had touched. Perhaps the other women, during their own menstrual periods, would come by, for they would be unclean at that time any way; but over time, as the woman's disease continued, perhaps even they stopped coming.

For her ongoing flow of blood could be understood to be a punishment for sin that the woman committed, yet refused to acknowledge and repent. Eve was punished for her sin of disobedience by "pain in childbearing" (Gen. 3:16); thus anything having to do with childbearing, such

¹⁴ Lev. 15:25-30.

as menstruation, was suspect. (The fact that even today women are sometimes referred to as suffering from "the curse" when they are menstruating is a witness to the enduring belief that women's ability to give birth, and the processes that make it possible, are cursed by God, and continue to be thought of as unclean.) Because the woman experienced "the curse" in the extreme, and could not get well, even after "enduring much under many physicians," she must be disobeying God, somehow; what husband would want his wife to associate with such a woman and possibly be contaminated as well? (Thereby putting himself at risk, too.)

Somehow the woman has heard about Jesus, and about his miraculous healing ability; in her desperation, she decides she will risk making contact with him, for he is her last hope. She plans carefully; she will make her way unseen through the crowd and briefly touch his clothing, for she believes that even that small touch can heal her. On the day when Jesus arrives, she veils herself and puts on clothes she has not worn for many months, hoping that no one in the crowd will recognize her. She makes her way through the crowd quietly, not shouting out "Unclean! Unclean!" as was required by the law (Lev. 13:45).

Did anyone wonder who this strange woman was? Did anyone recognize her? We do not know; we only know that eventually she came up behind Jesus, reached past the people around him, and touched his cloak. Immediately, says Mark (using his favorite word), she feels in her body that she is healed, and turns to make her way joyfully--but quietly--back through the crowd. She will wait the requisite seven days, and

then on the eighth day report to the priest as required by the law and make her offering so that she can return, after twelve long years, to the land of the living.

But Jesus, "aware that power had gone forth from him," stops, turns around in the crowd and asks, "Who touched my clothes?" The disciples look at him in disbelief--everyone around him has touched his clothes. But Jesus persists, and the woman, knowing that she has been discovered, knowing that she has made virtually everyone in her town unclean by her presence in the crowd, comes forward with fear and trembling to reveal herself and to accept the consequences.

Probably, she also came with some confidence, (and perhaps some defiance), because she knew that, at long last, she was healed; in any event, she tells Jesus "the whole truth." He, rather than condemning her, rather than being angry with her for making him unclean, calls her "Daughter," bringing her back to a position in the center of the community from the edges where she had spent so many years. He affirms her action, telling her that it is her faith that has made her well, and invites her to go in peace, healed of her disease.

What do we learn about Jesus' world-view from The Woman With a Hemorrhage? The Jesus of the story gives her back her body--not just freed from disease, but also freed from its association with sin.¹⁹ Jesus does not tell her that she is healed because her sins are forgiven, as is true in some of his other healings; instead, he affirms that

¹⁹ Pearson, 100. It could be argued that this interpretation of the story is stretching the fabric of the text beyond what it can bear. I believe women's experience of menstruation, and how our culture--supposedly less bounded than Jesus'-- deals with it, supports my interpretation, however.

her disease is just that--a physical ailment that has no relation to how she has fulfilled (or not fulfilled) God's laws. By his words, he breaks the curse by which Eve was punished for her disobedience. By his words, he breaks the curse of "original sin" and restores The Woman With a Hemorrhage--and by extension, all other women--to the "original blessing" in which they were created.¹¹ By his words, he resurrects The Woman with a Hemorrhage from the living death into which the boundaries of her culture's understanding of what it means to be clean and unclean have placed her.

By challenging the curse imposed on Eve, Jesus topples one of the pillars of Judeo-Christian patriarchy: that the inferior, submissive position of women is ordained by God in response to Eve's action of eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The story of the Woman With a Hemorrhage, when understood in this way, calls into question the entire bounded world-view of patriarchy, which stems from the hierarchy of place for men and women established in Genesis 3. Jesus reveals to the crowd--and by extension to us--the vision of a world in which women's biological reproductive processes are seen as natural, rather than as threatening and dangerous to the fabric of society--and therefore labeled "unclean." Jesus thus eliminates the boundary of gender-biased uncleanness as a way to establish place. In his world, women are not prevented from participation in the activities

¹¹ Matthew Fox describes the movement from original sin to original blessing as a paradigm shift that has wide-ranging repercussions for all of Judeo-Christian culture. See Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 82.

of society because of their bodies; their bodies, like men's bodies, incarnate the divine image.

Jesus' world-view challenges our society's understanding of women's bodies, which continues to tell women that we are unclean. Think of all the commercials for feminine hygiene products which promise to make us feel "fresh and clean," while there is not a single television commercial for a masculine hygiene product that promises to make men feel fresh and clean. There are not even any television commercials for condoms, which would help save lives in this era of AIDS. The unspoken message women receive from these commercials is that their natural biological functions make them unclean, while men's natural biological functions do not.²¹

The story of The Woman With a Hemorrhage reveals a Jesus who accepts the crossing of restrictive, life-denying boundaries. But even more importantly, the story is about faithful action that risks crossing the boundaries of social death in search of life.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

Early in the morning, [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now the law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman

²¹ Pearson, 102.

standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."¹¹

She has been "caught in the act"; she is guilty. The group of men who bring her to Jesus testify to her guilt, humiliating her in front of the whole crowd gathered in the temple area to hear Jesus teach. But rather than being truly concerned by her trespass of the law, they find her a convenient object by which to test Jesus.¹² "The law of Moses commands us to stone her. What do you say?" they press him. But Jesus makes no response; instead, he bends over, and begins to draw in the dirt with his finger.

What does he draw? The text does not say. James A. Sanders hypothesizes that perhaps Jesus drew on the ground the symbols for the ten commandments--looking up to answer the men when he had completed the first four commandments, which deal with human beings' relationship to God. "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her," Jesus says; then he bends down and continues writing the symbols for the last six commandments, those which deal with human beings' relationships to each other. As the men watch him write, perhaps they reflect on how well they have kept the commandments throughout their lives; how can they possibly say they are without sin?¹⁴ Helen Bruch Pearson notes, "If they chose to cast a stone, they

¹² John 8:2-11.

¹³ Pearson, 123.

¹⁴ Sanders related this hypothesis in either a class or a sermon at the School of Theology at Claremont in the early 1980s; the environment doesn't stay with me, but the insight does.

would commit blasphemy by claiming they were without sin. If they chose not to cast a stone, they would pronounce themselves guilty."¹⁵ The men find themselves on the horns of a dilemma.

What do we know about the woman? We can assume she was married, for a woman could commit adultery only when she was married or engaged. If she was unmarried, then her male partner was required to pay her father fifty shekels and marry her; because he had violated her, he could never divorce her.¹⁶ If the woman was married or engaged, then she and her partner were required to be put to death so as to "purge the evil from Israel."¹⁷ They had violated her husband's property rights by breaking the tenth commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."¹⁸

The laws related to adultery highlight the most glaring omission in the story: where is her partner? Why has he not been brought in front of Jesus and the crowd to be stoned to death as the law commands? His absence alone condemns the woman's accusers; if nothing else, while Jesus was writing on the ground, they must have thought about how they had broken the laws related to adultery by not bringing her partner to justice. And so, one by one, they disappear.

When Jesus is through writing he straightens up, and finds that he is alone with the woman. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned

¹⁵ Pearson, 129.

¹⁶ Deut. 22:28-29.

¹⁷ Deut. 22:22.

¹⁸ Exod. 20:17.

you?" "No one, sir," she replies. "Then neither do I; go your way, and do not sin again." She is caught in the act; she is guilty; yet she is not condemned, either by her accusers or by Jesus. Instead, her accusers leave her; Jesus gives her the opportunity to live her life in a new way.

What does the story of The Woman Caught in Adultery reveal?

First, Jesus does not participate in a double standard in which "women were used as scapegoats and blamed for the social ills for which men denied any responsibility."⁹ Pearson observes that Jesus hands back the responsibility for carrying out the woman's sentence to her accusers; technically, by catching her in the act they have all the proof they need to act on the law. But first Jesus invites them to look at their real motives in the situation. Drawing in the dirt gives them time to reflect on how well they have lived out the full letter of the law by bringing only the woman to justice. By refusing to participate in their double standard, Jesus invites the men to own their own participation in that double standard.

But Jesus also invites the woman to take responsibility for her actions. We do not know the condition of her marriage which led her to engage in adultery; all we know is that she did it. By acknowledging her guilt but not condemning her to death, Jesus invites the woman to take a good look at her life, and decide how she will live it in the future. He enables her to take some responsibility for making her own decisions about her life, rather than allowing all of them to be made for her by others. Jesus liberates her from the potentially oppressive

⁹ Pearson, 128.

structures of her society and empowers her to claim her life as her own."¹⁰ In doing so, he names her as a person in her own right; she is no longer an object, but is instead a person with will or volition of her own. One can see through this story that regardless of gender, one is judged by the choices one makes. All persons, male and female, are invited to take responsibility for their lives. In doing so, they are invited to claim for themselves the divine image in which they were created.

The Woman at the Well

[Jesus] had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her,

¹⁰ Pearson, 130.

"Woman, believe me, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want," or "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him. . . .

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."¹¹

She is a woman. She is a Samaritan. She is coming to the well to draw water at noon, during the hottest part of the day. All these things mark her as undesirable, as someone whom a fine, upstanding Jewish rabbi should avoid at all costs.¹²

But Jesus, sitting on the well cover, tired and thirsty and hot from his journey from Judea to this part of Samaria, has never been one to avoid the undesirable. And so, as the woman reaches the well, looking at him curiously yet cautiously, he says to her, "Give me a drink of water." Amazingly, he has spoken to a woman, and a Samaritan

¹¹ John 4:4-30, 39-42.

¹² Pearson, 144.

woman at that, and he's done it in the bright noonday sun, for all the world to see! The Mishnah's teaching was clear:

Speak not much with a woman. Since a man's own wife is meant here, how much more does not this apply to the wife of another? The wise men say, 'Who speaks much with a woman draws down misfortune on himself, neglects the words of the law, and finally earns hell!'³³

Yet in his conversation with The Woman at the Well, the Johannine Jesus certainly initiates "much speaking"; what follows is one of the most interesting and revealing theological discussions of his ministry.³⁴ And much of what is revealed is revealed because of the very things that mark her as undesirable: woman, Samaritan, coming to the well alone at noon.

That she is a woman is unmistakable; what is revealing is the depth of the conversation in which she and Jesus engage. Jesus' response to her question about why he is speaking to her can be understood as a discussion about Torah and his role in fulfilling and superseding it. "Gift of life" and "living water" (v.10) were terms "used in the Jewish rabbinic teachings as other names for the Torah."³⁵ To this woman Jesus reveals that he is the living water--the new Torah. And although her response seems to miss his point (Give me this water,

³³ Mishnah Aboth 1, 5, quoted in Pearson, 144.

³⁴ In the story of The Woman at the Well, it is important to keep in mind the function which this story plays in the whole gospel, and to recognize that the author of the gospel of John no doubt constructed the entire conversation to address particular theological concerns. I believe one of those concerns may well have been "Is it appropriate for women to be evangelists?" For a more in-depth discussion of Johannine concerns, see Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1983), 323-34.

³⁵ Pearson, 146.

so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water, v.15), at another level it reveals her deep thirst for spiritual knowledge, made clear in their later conversation about which mountain was the appropriate one for worshipping God.¹⁶

In between these two theological conversations comes an ethical one: Jesus, in an abrupt change of subject, invites the woman to get her husband and bring him back to the well. The woman, in a moment of truth-telling, reveals the reason she is at the well alone in the middle of the day: she has no husband. Jesus fills in the rest of the story: she is living with a man to whom she is not married, after five previous marriages. Jewish custom provided for three marriages; any more, although legally possible, "were seen as deviant and immoral."¹⁷

"Since this custom was ancient and supported by the intent of the law of Moses, the limit on marriages was probably a Samaritan custom, also."¹⁸

Traditionally, water was drawn at the cool of the day in the morning and evening, when all the women would gather and share news of their lives. By coming alone at the hottest time of the day, the woman revealed that she had been marginalized by her community, probably because of her marital status. But Jesus doesn't judge the woman; instead he simply affirms that she has told the truth. And when she changes the subject, he engages her in their second theological discussion, rather than pressing her further about her lifestyle.

¹⁶ Pearson, 148.

¹⁷ Pearson, 152.

¹⁸ Pearson, 152

Her next statement reveals her thirst for spiritual knowledge: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you [Jews] say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem" (v.20). The unspoken question hanging in the air between them is "Whose people are right? yours or mine?" That unspoken question laid bare the centuries of rivalry and ethnic hatred that had resulted from the separation of Israel into two kingdoms after the reign of Solomon. The northern kingdom, invaded and sent into exile first, was repopulated by other peoples conquered by the Assyrian Empire, who intermarried with the remnant of Israelites, creating a polyglot people called Samaritans, who were looked down upon by their more pure-blooded cousins to the south in Judea."

In response to the woman's question, Jesus reveals the radical nature of his vision of the reign of God: "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him" (v.23). Neither her people nor his people are right; instead, God will raise up a new people who come to God, not from the right place, but with the right attitude. In response to Jesus' vision, the woman reveals her faith in the Messiah who is coming and who will make all things clear. In response to her faith, Jesus reveals to her that he is the expected Messiah.

At that moment, Jesus' disciples return, and the intimate conversation between The Woman at the Well and the Messiah comes to an end. The disciples, in a rare moment of judicious silence, keep their

" Pearson, 143.

astonishment that Jesus is speaking to a Samaritan woman to themselves. Knowing that their conversation is at an end, the Woman leaves behind her water jar, and rushes back to town "as a hauler of living water which needed no container other than herself."⁴⁰ She shares the good news: "I have met a man who told me everything I ever did--I think he's the Messiah!" And the text tells us something amazing: "Many Samaritans from that city believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony"(v.39). This woman of ill-repute becomes the first evangelist, witnessing to her faith in the newly revealed Messiah.⁴¹

In speaking "much" to the Woman, Jesus crosses the boundary of gender, and makes it appropriate to engage in conversation with women of all sorts. In speaking to her, Jesus crosses the boundary of nationality and ethnicity, and makes it appropriate to engage in conversation with someone of another race. In speaking to her, Jesus crosses the boundary of social convention, and makes it appropriate to speak with someone who does not live up to society's moral standards. In speaking to her, Jesus challenges all the barriers that society erects to keep people in place--in the right place.

⁴⁰ Pearson, 154.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, her testimony is not allowed to stand on its own; in verse 42 we read: "They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'" Although this story follows the Johannine pattern in which someone first witnesses about Jesus to another person, who then has his/her own experience of Jesus and believes because of that experience (Andrew bringing Simon Peter to Jesus, for example), the woman's experience of being the first to whom Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah, and her role as the first evangelist, has been devalued and down-played by patriarchal church tradition, which has not remembered her as an evangelist, but as a morally lax "tramp" instead. See Gail R. O'Day, "John," in The Woman's Bible Commentary, 295-6.

But not just in speaking to The Woman at the Well; it is in engaging her in theological and ethical conversation that he breaks down the barrier that says women should learn in silence and not speak, that women have feelings rather than thoughts; it is in revealing himself to her as the messiah that he breaks down the barrier that says women are not able witnesses to the Christ; it is in sharing with her his vision of the reign of God that he breaks down the barrier that says gender, race, and class tell us who is in, and who is out of place in parts of the cosmic order.

The Woman Who Anointed Jesus

*While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,
as he sat at the table,
a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard,
and she broke open the jar
and poured the ointment on his head.*

*But some were there who said to one another in anger,
"Why was the ointment wasted in this way?
For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,
and the money given to the poor."
And they scolded her.*

*But Jesus said,
"Let her alone; why do you trouble her?
She has performed a good service for me.
For you always have the poor with you,
and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish;
but you will not always have me.
She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand
for its burial.
Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,
what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."⁴²*

Her story is told in all four canonical gospels, but in such different ways that it is hard to tell what really happened. All that is sure is that there was a woman who anointed Jesus while he was at a

⁴² Mark 14:3-9.

meal, which caused objections to be raised by the onlookers, objections Jesus rejected by approving of her action.⁴³ So how does one tell the story of The Woman Who Anointed Jesus? Mark told the story first; let us consider what Mark's telling of the woman's encounter with Jesus implied for Mark's community, and thus what it might mean for ours.⁴⁴

Jesus is at a dinner party in Bethany, given by Simon the leper. At some point in the meal, a woman enters carrying a jar of ointment, which she proceeds to break open and pour out onto Jesus' head, anointing his head with the ointment. Because of the lovely fragrance that fills the room, the men at table with Jesus can tell that it is ointment made from the spikenard plant. The ointment is very costly; the jar brought by the woman is worth three hundred days' wages, according to the text (a denarius was a day's wage). The men eating with Jesus are horrified--at the woman's actions as well as at Jesus' willingness to allow them. How can he allow a woman to enter into their all-male dinner party? How can he be concerned with the poor, yet allow this woman to waste the ointment on him? Rather than confront him, however, they scold the woman. Jesus speaks in her defense: "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a good and beautiful thing for me. . . . she has anointed my body beforehand for my burial" (v.6, 8). And then he makes that curious statement: "Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is

⁴³ Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, xiii.

⁴⁴ The thoughts and observations in this section were first explored in Natalie K. Houghtby, "The Anointing at Bethany: Rhetorical Argument or Discipleship Paradigm?" photocopy, 1990.

preached in all the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (v.9).⁴⁵

Of course, we do not remember her; her story is not a part of the regular Sunday lectionary, and so we rarely encounter her.⁴⁶ What was it that the Woman did for Jesus that made him say that people would remember her actions wherever the gospel was preached?

First, she anoints him. Her action is the prophetic sign-action of Samuel anointing David as king (1 Sam.16:13). Like Samuel, she anoints Jesus beforehand for his kingship/messiahship. Her actions, and Jesus' interpretation of them, give a new understanding about messiahship: messiahship comes through suffering and death, rather than exaltation and enthronement.⁴⁷ The Woman witnesses to this understanding by her silent act of breaking open and pouring out the ointment on Jesus' head while he sits at the table.

⁴⁵ Burton L. Mack identifies this passage as an elaborated chreia in A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 199-204; and in Mack and Vernon K. Robbins, Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1989), 85-106. His analysis, when considered with Fiorenza's description of the text as a paradigm for "right" discipleship (pp. xiii-xiv), raises the possibility that the women-theme in Mark is a deliberate, classic argumentation pattern throughout the gospel--a point for further research. See Houghtby, "Anointing," 8.

⁴⁶ Mark's version of the anointing is found as a part of the Palm/Passion Sunday reading for Year B in the Revised Common Lectionary. The only other version of the anointing that is used in the lectionary is John's, which names Judas as the objector and Mary of Bethany as the anointer. This story is assigned on the Fifth Sunday in Lent in Year C, and on Monday of Holy Week in all three years. For the lectionary text assignments see The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 230-31.

⁴⁷ Fiorenza, xiv.

And there is the second clue: She breaks and pours while Jesus is at table. Those words call to mind the Last Supper scene, and Jesus' action in breaking the bread and pouring out the wine as the disciples are gathered at table with him. In this story she performs the actions of Jesus at the Supper, actions which Jesus affirms in the face of her detractors' objections. By affirming her actions, and by pronouncing that what she has done will be remembered whenever and wherever the gospel is proclaimed, Jesus makes room for women to be in leadership positions in the church, serving at the Lord's table--as host, rather than as serving maid.

Again, this story reveals that gender is not a barrier to full participation in God's reign. The Woman Who Anoints Jesus takes her place at the table as celebrant, and is affirmed by Jesus for doing so. Her story challenges all those portions of the Body of Christ that do not allow women to celebrate the sacraments or to preach, and confirms all those that do.

The Canaanite Woman

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Matt. 15:21-28.

She is assertive. She is a foreigner. She comes from the wrong religious tradition. She will not take "no" for an answer. And so she challenges Jesus to examine his own world-view, and to open it up to possibilities he may not have imagined previously. By refusing to back down, she helps him to cross the boundaries of religious election and make God's promise of salvation available to all persons.

Her story is told by both Mark and Matthew.⁴⁹ Mark names her as a "Syrophoenician Woman," focusing on her racial and political identity. Matthew names her a "Canaanite Woman" and focuses on her religious identity. It is from Matthew's perspective that we consider her story.⁵⁰

In Matthew's telling, the story is harsh. Jesus is not the same kind, loving, compassionate man as we like to think him. First he is silent, ignoring her, and her request. Then, when she has made such a nuisance of herself that the disciples cannot stand it any longer, he says he has a specific mission, and she is not part of it. Finally, she assumes a posture of supplication, yet even then he responds to the woman out of his own ethnocentrism, using an ethnic slur--"dog"--to

⁴⁹ Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28.

⁵⁰ To understand fully the impact of the story of the Canaanite Woman within the gospel, it is important to continue reading in the fifteenth chapter. This encounter and interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite Woman is followed by the feeding of the four thousand, usually interpreted as the feeding of the Gentiles. If one assumes that Matthew's gospel has been written for a primarily Jewish Christian community, Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite Woman becomes the pivotal point that turns the gospel--and the community--out to the world so that the community can respond affirmatively to the "great commission" of 28:19.

rebuff her request for assistance.⁵¹ But there she uses her wit, and turns the slur into a word-play, one that makes Jesus hear her in a new way so that finally he grants her request of healing for her daughter.

Throughout the story, The Canaanite Woman refers to Jesus as "Lord," used by Matthew to indicate true believers. The other title she uses to address him is "Son of David," used by the marginalized and outcast.⁵² Jesus' own behavior toward her in the story confirms her use of "Son of David"--he marginalizes her and treats her as an outcast. But even in the face of his rejection, she remains true to her faith in his God's justice and mercy, continuing to call him "Lord" even when he uses a racial epitaph against her.

The Canaanite Woman's story throws into relief the world-view of Jesus that has been discovered in the other stories. In those stories his world-view is far more open; he crosses boundaries fearlessly, sure that the cosmic order will not come crashing down. The cosmic order (God's reign), as Jesus envisions it in the other stories, is a universe in which boundaries based on gender, race, class, religious prohibition, and physical condition are erased. His actions in the other stories encourage the five women to claim for themselves the divine image in which they were created, to live to the full their God-given potential and possibilities, to reach beyond societally-imposed roles and life-denying barriers. His response to The Canaanite Woman is consequently even more harsh in contrast, especially since several of the other stories can be found in Matthew with Jesus' boundary-crossing intact.

⁵¹ Pearson, 82.

⁵² Pearson, 79.

In her persistent faithfulness, however, The Canaanite Woman witnesses to the power and the truth of an open world-view. She calls Jesus to live up to his full potential, to claim for himself the understanding that all persons, regardless of nationality, or gender, or religious persuasion, come under the sovereignty of God, who has created all things and called them good. Her cleverness and persistence invite Jesus to cross the boundary made by God's particular covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:1-14), and reclaim the universal covenant God made with Noah and all living creatures (Gen. 9:8-17). She does so by engaging Jesus in word-play, by meeting his rigidity with cleverness--cleverness that begins with his definitions yet manipulates the boundaries set by those definitions so that new possibilities are imagined.⁵³

Because of her persistence, we too are invited to cross the boundaries of racial and religious prejudice as Jesus did.

Stretching the Horizon of the Church

The stories of these six unnamed women have highlighted some social boundaries, and how Jesus either maintained or crossed them. The boundaries included gender, ethnicity, religious perspective, sexuality, keeping the commandments (following the rules), purity, and gender roles. The stories suggest that Jesus was willing to cross social boundaries without fearing that the cosmic order would come crashing down. Even in the one instance where he tried to maintain the social boundary of religious purity (the Canaanite Woman), he was cajoled into crossing that boundary when the Woman bested him at his own game.

⁵³ This insight came through conversation with Rod Parrott, Associate Dean, Disciples Seminary Foundation and adjunct professor of New Testament, School of Theology at Claremont, 26 January 1993.

These stories testify to a deep memory in the early Christian communities of Jesus as one who is willing to cross social boundaries. This willingness puts him on the openness end of the world-view model spectrum, and makes these stories appropriate resources for congregations seeking to reclaim for themselves the world-view that empowered the earliest disciples.

How does one make the shift to such a world-view? This chapter has suggested that careful Bible study designed to re-hear the texts in an open way provides one possibility. The next chapter looks at whether it is possible to make such a shift by changing the liturgy.

CHAPTER 4

Changing Our Symbols, Changing Our World

How does one shift one's world-view so as to inhabit a different world? Jonathan Z. Smith claims that "to change stance is to totally alter one's symbols and inhabit a different world."¹ Smith's statement implies that one simply alters one's symbols. But how does one go about doing that? Smith, unfortunately, doesn't answer that question specifically in his essay. But he does point to some possibilities. Earlier in the essay he stated: "Once an individual or culture has expressed its vision of its place, a whole language of symbols and social structures will follow."² So by changing one's language, it may be possible to alter one's symbols. That possibility is the underlying focus of this chapter.

A process for change is also suggested by Smith's article. Smith describes something he calls "ritualized disjunction."³ Ritualized disjunction is the way in which a society deals regularly with formative events in its history (especially in its mythical history), by recalling, for example, a time before the community was formed, and the events which led to its creation through struggle and hardship or the trials of its founder.

Each society has moments of ritualized disjunction, moments of "descent into chaos," of ritual reversal, of liminality, of collective anomie. But these are part of a highly structured scenario in which these moments will be overcome through the

¹ J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 143.

² J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 141.

³ J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 145.

creation of a new world, the raising of an individual to a new status, or the strengthening of community.⁴

Such a moment of ritualized disjunction in the Christian tradition is the passion and death of Jesus, overcome by his resurrection and the establishment of a new community in his name. The Holy Week events of the liturgical year--Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter--bring each Christian face to face annually with the reality that the "Son of God" is defeated by the forces of evil--at least for three days. But then God intervenes in history to resurrect the Son and to establish a new creation in which those forces of evil and death have been overcome. In those traditions that observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper more frequently than just during Holy Week, this pattern of ritualized disjunction is repeated each time the sacrament is celebrated.⁵

Smith continues by suggesting that social change becomes necessary when an individual or society experiences disjunction in the real world.

Change--in the strongest sense of the word, a society's conversion--is required when such moments [of disjunction] meld into history. When the world is perceived to be chaotic, reversed, liminal, filled with anomie. Then man [sic] finds himself [sic] in a world he [sic] does not recognize; and perhaps even more terrible, man [sic] finds himself [sic] to have a self he [sic] does not recognize. Then he [sic] will need to create a new world, to express his [sic] sense of a new place.⁶

⁴ J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 145

⁵ If Holy Week is an event of ritualized disjunction, the combined seasons of Lent-Easter can be understood in the same way, and used intentionally as a 13-week time frame for symbol change that leads to social change.

⁶ J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 145-46.

If change will happen when a culture or an individual experiences real, not just ritualized disjunction, is it possible that change can happen within the ritualized disjunction "event" (ritual)?

Unbeknownst to itself, the United Methodist Church may have begun just such a process of change in its shift from celebrating "Holy Communion" to celebrating "Word and Table." At its 1984 General Conference, the denomination adopted new service forms for the Lord's Supper, services that "represent an earnest attempt to heed [John] Wesley's admonition that our worship 'follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church,' while at the same time speaking to the condition of contemporary United Methodists."¹ At the 1988 General Conference those services, in somewhat adapted form, were incorporated into the denomination's new hymnal, making them available to most congregations for the first time.

In changing the way in which the sacrament is understood and administered, is it possible that the denomination has shifted its world-view? Let us compare the texts of the old and new services to note the differences, and see if we can discern such a shift.

The Ritual for the Lord's Supper, 1966 and 1988

The older service, found in The Methodist Hymnal, begins with a set of rubrics instructing the pastor that it is "his [sic] duty to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at regularly appointed times"² The rubrics continue with the key elements of the

¹ United Methodist Church, The Book of Services (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), 8-9.

² Methodist Church, The Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1966), no. 830.

service that should be included at all times, whether the Sacrament is administered in worship, in hospitals, or in homes: "the Invitation, the General Confession, the Prayer for Pardon, the Comfortable Words, the Prayer of Consecration, the Prayer of Humble Access, the Words of Distribution, the Prayer of Thanksgiving, and the Benediction."⁹ These elements will be used as the starting point for my comparison.

The Invitation

1966:¹⁰ Said by the minister, facing the people while they are standing:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to almighty God.

1988: Said by the pastor from behind the Lord's table; the congregation is assumed to be seated, since this immediately follows a time of congregational prayer.¹¹

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and who seek to live in peace with one another.
Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

The 1966 service gives more specific conditions about the attitude one should bring to the table: "truly and earnestly repent of your sins"

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all service texts are taken from The Methodist Hymnal if designated "1966," and from The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 6-11, if designated "1988."

¹¹ Rubrics regarding placement have been added to the service in The United Methodist Book of Worship, 33-39.

vs. "earnestly repent of their sin" (1988); are in love and charity with your neighbors" vs. "seek to live in peace with one another" (1988); "intend to live a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways" vs. "all who love [Christ]" (1988). The attitude one brings to confession is similarly more specific: "Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to almighty God." The 1988 text says: "Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another."

Of particular importance in our look at symbol change are the two parallel clauses "intend to live a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways" and "all who love [Christ]." Although they may be parallel in function, they certainly are not parallel in meaning! The 1966 version is full of the language of boundedness: "following the commandments of God"; walking ... in [God's] holy ways." The 1988 version, on the other hand, leaves wide open the question of what it means to "love" Christ, and how that might affect one's life.

Another important difference is how the invitation is made. In the 1966 version both the invitation to the table and to confession are given in the second person from the minister to the people, thereby indicating that there is a different status between clergy and lay, and implying that lay persons have more need of confession. In the 1988 version, however, the invitation to the table is made in the third person so that everyone (including the pastor) is invited; the

invitation to confession is made in the first person, so that both clergy and lay are understood to have the same need to confess.

Yet another difference is the injunction to repent of one's sins (1966) vs. one's sin (1988). The change in emphasis moves one from recounting a laundry list of "bad" deeds and mistakes towards the recognition that being in wrong relationship with God is what causes our bad deeds and mistakes; true repentance involves moving into right relationship with God, which enables us to choose to live our lives differently. John Rice has suggested the following image to illustrate this difference between the two services:

Imagine a path. In the 1966 service the path is narrow, and the way is crowded with other Christians. The path leads to God, who insists that people not leave the path. The problem is that there are interesting, tempting things that are off the path, which people keep leaving the path to investigate. Those tempting, interesting things are sins, which, when reminded that we are supposed to be on the narrow path, we implore God to overlook and forgive, and to let us back on the path. In this service the world off the path is evil, and leads to temptation and sin.

In the 1988 service, there is also a path. The problem is that people insist on staying on the path, looking neither to the left nor the right--and therefore missing or ignoring the needs of persons and of creation that are visible only when one gets off the path. People who stay on the path also miss or ignore the amazing abundance of God's prodigal creativity that can only be seen when one leaves the path. In this service, sin is ignoring both the needs and the gifts that are off

the path, thereby not participating in the work of Love in the world. In this service, the world off the path is God's good creation, and is the place where we are invited to be the embodiment of God's love.¹²

Yet another difference between the services is whom one confesses to: in the 1966 version, confession is made solely to (almighty) God, while in the 1988 version one confesses before God and the community. Thus is made explicit the recognition that one's actions have an impact on others, and that faith is more than a private affair between God and the individual Christian. Finally, in the 1966 version one makes a "humble" confession to an "almighty" God, placing oneself verbally into a position of "power under" and God into a position of "power over" (which establishes boundaries of place in terms of power). In the 1988 version, however, one confesses simply to God and to the other members of the gathered community--which recognizes implicitly an equality of status between covenant partners.

The Confession and Pardon

1966: The rubrics state: "The minister, kneeling and facing the Lord's table, and all the people, kneeling or bowed, shall make together this general confession:"

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all men [*sic*]: We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine majesty. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of

¹² John S. Rice, Executive Director, WorshipWorks, in conversation with author, 25 January 1993.

life, to the honor and glory of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And then the minister prays alone:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy great mercy hast promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn to thee: Have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins; confirm and strengthen us in all goodness; and bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And the people respond: Amen.

1988: There are no separate rubrics; therefore, the pastor is still standing behind the table, the people are seated. They pray in unison:

Merciful God,
we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have failed to be an obedient church.
We have not done your will,
we have broken your law,
we have rebelled against your love,
we have not loved our neighbors,
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.
Forgive us, we pray.
Free us for joyful obedience,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

All pray in silence, then the leader says to the people:

Hear the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Then the people say to the leader:

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Then all say together:

Glory to God. Amen.

The difference in tone between the two prayers of confession is striking. Although both prayers recognize that God is the one against

whom wrong has been committed, they do so in very different ways and with very different language. The 1966 version uses exalted language to establish the difference in place between the one to whom the prayer is offered and those who are offering the prayer. The adjectives used to describe God are: "almighty," "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," "maker of all things," "judge of all men." God is clearly seen to have power over the supplicants, who have "grievously committed" "manifold sins and wickedness" against God's "divine majesty." They present themselves in a posture of begging (verbally, and, if said while kneeling, physically), by "acknowledg[ing]" and "bewail[ing]" their "misdoings," and asking their "most merciful Father" to "have mercy on [them], have mercy on [them]." Then, after asking God to "forgive [them] all that is past" for the sake of "thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ," they conclude by petitioning that they may "ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life," to the glory and honor of God's name.

The 1988 version is much more matter-of-fact. The one adjective used to describe God in this prayer is "merciful." Then the sin that has been committed is described in detail: (a) "not loved you with our whole heart," (b) "failed to be an obedient church," (c) "not done your will," (d) "broken your law," (e) "rebelled against your love," (f) "not loved our neighbors," and (g) "not heard the cry of the needy." The elements of sin identified by the prayer thus describe sin as abusing what Jesus identified as the key to eternal life: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as

yourself."¹³ After naming the sin, forgiveness is requested, that those who are praying may be "free[d] for joyful obedience," and the prayer is offered through the good graces of "Jesus Christ our Lord."

There is a striking difference between the two pardons as well: in the 1966 version the minister offers the prayer on behalf of the whole people; in the 1988 version both the leader and the people offer forgiveness to each other. In the 1966 version, therefore, the minister acts as mediator between the people and God. In the 1988 version, however, all Christians are understood to have equal access to God (and to have equal need for pardon!). The way in which the person who is leading the prayer is named is of significance as well; in the 1966 version, the person is consistently named as the "minister." In the 1988 version, however, "minister" is not used anywhere in the rubrics, because the denomination understands all Christians to be ministers by virtue of their baptism.¹⁴ In this particular section, not even the usual "pastor" is used; instead, the term "leader" is used, which indicates that a lay person may lead the congregation in the confession and pardon--a crossing of the boundary of ordination. (I have used the designation appropriate to the specified service throughout in describing the rubrics.)

The Comfortable Words

1966: The minister stands and faces the people and says:

¹³ Luke 10:27-28.

¹⁴ United Methodist Church, The Book of Discipline (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1988), pars. 105-06, 113-14.

Hear what comfortable words the scriptures say to all that truly turn to the Lord: (Then follows one or more appropriate scripture verses.)

1988: There are no separate "comfortable words"; instead, they are incorporated into the pardon as the "good news":

Hear the good news:
Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;
that proves God's love toward us.

What follows the pardon in this service is the Peace, which is exchanged between "all, including the pastor." In adding the peace, which is omitted in the 1966 version, the church has reclaimed an element of worship from "the primitive Church." In keeping with this desire to worship in a manner that accords with scripture and the practice of the early church, all of the above prayers come as a response to the reading and proclamation of the Word in the 1988 service. In the 1966 service, however, all of these prayers have taken place prior to the reading of the lessons and the sermon. The United Methodist Book of Worship describes the difference.

In an opening prayer of confession, the people confess the sin of which they are already aware and then come to the Proclamation of the Word in the assurance of God's pardoning grace. . . . Confession as a Response to the Word includes the added awareness of personal and corporate sin to which persons are led by the Proclamation of the Word.¹¹

By moving the confession and pardon to after the proclamation of the word, therefore, the 1988 service again supports its understanding of "sin" vs. "sins"—that we confess more than just a laundry list of

¹¹ UMC, Book of Worship, 21.

personal items, that there is systemic and corporate sin which we must also name, and seek to change.¹⁶

The Prayer of Consecration (1966) and

The Great Thanksgiving (1988)

Both prayers begin with the 'Sursum Corda' ("lift up your hearts," in Latin), and are very similar through the Sanctus. After the Sanctus, the differences again become apparent. The 1966 prayer continues with:

Almighty God, Our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there, by the one offering of himself, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; and did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again:

Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee, and grant that we, receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his passion, death, and resurrection, may be partakers of the divine nature through him:

Who in the same night that he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying: Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the cup; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins; do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.

And the people respond: Amen.

The 1988 service continues the Great Thanksgiving after the Sanctus with the following:

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

¹⁶ I would guess that such an understanding of confession (as primarily systemic and corporate) appeals more to cultural left Baby Boomers, who tend not to agree with the view of humanity that says humans are automatically evil.

Your Spirit anointed him
 to preach good news to the poor,
 to proclaim release to the captives
 and recovering of sight to the blind,
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
 and to announce that the time had come
 when you would save your people.
 He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners.
 By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection
 you gave birth to your church,
 delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
 and made with us a new covenant
 by water and the Spirit.
 When the Lord Jesus ascended,
 he promised to be with us always,
 in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.
 On the night in which he gave himself up for us,
 he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
 gave it to his disciples, and said:
 "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
 Do this in remembrance of me."
 When the supper was over, he took the cup,
 gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
 "Drink from this, all of you;
 this is my blood of the new covenant,
 poured out for you and for many
 for the forgiveness of sins.
 Do this, as often as you drink it,
 in remembrance of me."

The prayers are significantly different after the words of institution,
 so stopping for a moment to compare the prayers through the words of
 institution may be helpful.

The 1966 version gives the traditional "prayer of oblation"¹⁷ in
 which Christ's suffering and death are remembered, and the petitioners
 ask to be partakers in the divine nature by receiving the "creatures of
 bread and wine." The prayer focuses on Jesus' suffering and death as
 sacrifice and atonement: "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for
 the sins of the world." His suffering and death are given to him by the

¹⁷ Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, 2nd ed. (1945; reprint, New
 York: Seabury Press, 1982), 666.

"tender mercy" of his "father" for the redemption of the petitioners. (One wonders about a group of people who could pray such a prayer with equanimity over centuries.) The prayer also establishes Jesus' "command" to continue the meal as a "perpetual memory (anamnesis) of his precious death" until he returns. The oblation is followed by the Words of Institution.

The 1988 version gives a synopsis of Jesus' purpose and meaning. It is filled with the language of freedom and possibility, rather than of sacrifice and atonement: to preach good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives; to proclaim recovering of sight to the blind; to announce that God will save God's people now; to cross society's barriers of exclusion by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and eating with the wrong people; to deliver God's people from sin and death; to make a new covenant with God's people; to be present with God's people always.

The feelings I have while reading the prayers are radically different. While reading the 1966 prayer I wonder how merciful to me a God could be who requires such a sacrifice from "his" own son, even if the son's sacrifice is supposed to take care of anything I--or anyone else--might do. In the 1988 prayer, however, I feel God working through Jesus' life and ministry to make real a vision for society in which those who are marginalized find themselves brought into the center. And Jesus' suffering and death don't feel as if they were required (or necessarily premeditated), but rather that God transformed what happened and made something positive and new out of it.

In reading Dom Gregory Dix's classic work on worship, The Shape of the Liturgy, I find that my intuitive responses are not too far from the "academic" truth. Dix suggests that the Protestant reformers, in trying to maintain "the only meaning which protestantism could assign to the eucharist which did not contradict its own basic principle of 'justification by faith alone,'"¹⁸ focused on only one meaning for the Eucharist: sacrifice as atonement, "to the exclusion of all other aspects of the christian redemption."¹⁹ What was lost in the process was a richer understanding of the eucharist that includes a dual meaning for the "body" of Christ: both the actual body of Jesus of Nazareth, and the church as the body of Christ active in the world in the present.²⁰ The United Methodist Church, in returning to the historical roots of the liturgy, reclaims this richer meaning of the ritual.

¹⁸ Dix, 601.

¹⁹ Dix, 600.

²⁰ Dix, 250. Christine M. Smith offers a feminist critique of sacrifice which calls into question the Protestant emphasis on it noted by Dix. See Smith, Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989). Smith quotes Beverly Harrison: "Orthodox Christological interpretations imply that somehow the entire meaning of Jesus' life and work is to be found in his headlong race toward Golgotha, toward crucifixion--as if he sought suffering as an end in itself. . . . I believe that this way of viewing Jesus' work robs it of its--and his--moral radicality. . . . He accepted sacrifice. But his sacrifice was for the cause of radical love. . . . Sacrifice, I submit, is not a central moral goal or virtue in the Christian life. Radical acts of love expressing human solidarity and bringing mutual relationship to life--are the central virtues of the Christian moral life." See Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love," in Carol Robb, ed., Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 227. Smith goes on to say, "Sacrifice is often necessary in order to change unjust structures and participate in the liberation of oppressed and marginalized people, but sacrifice should never be seen as virtue to be idolized or romanticized. Sacrifice is often the necessary repercussion of the 'radical activity of love.'" Christine M. Smith, 83.

The remaining portion of the 1988 Great Thanksgiving continues to flesh out this understanding of the Lord's Supper, in contrast to the 1966 version, with a "prayer of oblation" in which the people offer themselves as Christ for the world.

And so,
in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

The people say together:

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

The pastor continues with the invocation of the Holy Spirit:

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.
By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other,
and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.
Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
all honor and glory is yours; almighty Father,
now and forever.

And the people respond: Amen.

Especially in this last section of the prayer, there is a clear understanding that participation in the meal makes one part of the body of Christ. In addition, there is an understanding that one's union with the Body comes with the expectation of service in the world.

The 1966 version continues true to its focus on sacrifice and atonement in the Prayer of Humble Access that follows the Words of Institution:

We do not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table.²¹ But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to partake of this Sacrament of thy Son Jesus Christ, that we may walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

The "Agnus Dei" follows the conclusion of the prayer:

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.

Not only is the focus on sacrifice and atonement continued in the Prayer of Humble Access and in the Agnus Dei (where Jesus is identified with the sacrificial Passover lamb), but it is continued by the language of boundedness: "we do not presume," "we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table," you are the "Lord, whose property is always to have mercy," "have mercy upon us," "grant us thy peace." Again, the participants present themselves in the posture of supplication, powerless to do anything except through the good offices (i.e., sacrifice) of God's Son.

At this point in the 1966 service, the elements of bread and wine are distributed. When all have partaken, a final prayer is offered--the prayer of oblation that is included in the body of the 1988 Great

²¹ It is interesting to remember the Canaanite Woman at this point, who, Jesus finally agreed, was worthy to gather up the crumbs. The prayer misuses the scriptural image.

Thanksgiving text. But note how this version uses the language of boundedness, so that a different tone is created:¹²

O Lord, our heavenly Father, we, thy humble servants, desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching to grant that, by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and thy whole Church may obtain forgiveness of our sins, and all other benefits of thy passion.

And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, **our souls and bodies**, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; **humbly beseeching thee** that all we who are partakers of this Holy Communion may be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. **And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses;**

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, by whom, with whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. Amen.

Again, the petitioners place themselves into a position of power under: they are "humble servants," "unworthy" because of their many sins to offer sacrifice, but perhaps their "heavenly Father" will accept it because of the "merits and death" of his son.

The Service Ending

In the 1988 service, the Great Thanksgiving is followed by the Lord's Prayer, the Breaking of the Bread, the Distribution of the Elements, and a concluding prayer after receiving that re-emphasizes the responsibility of those who have participated in the meal to be the Body of Christ for the world:

*Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,*

¹² The 1966 language that is different is indicated in boldface.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.¹³

Both services conclude with a final hymn, a benediction, and going forth, which repeats the action of Mark 14:26: "When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Reflections on the Comparison

The question with which I began this chapter was "How does one go about changing stance so as to inhabit a different world?" Is it possible to use an event of "ritualized disjunction" to enable such a change to happen before it is required by events beyond the culture's or individual's control? The comparison of two texts for the ritual of the Lord's Supper which come from two different eras of the United Methodist Church, indicates that a shift in emphasis can be discerned within them that might indicate a shift in world-view. I was particularly interested in seeing if there was a shift from a bounded world-view to a world-view that reflects more closely the openness of Jesus' world-view that was discovered in the preceding chapter.

¹³ When this version of the communion service first became generally available for trial use in 1980, the suggested "Prayer after Receiving" was dialogic, thereby framing the eucharist with two dialogues between celebrant and congregation. Although the 1988 version may be said in unison by the congregation, the rubrics also allow for it to be said by the pastor alone. To have kept the dialogue would have enhanced the understanding that everyone participates in the Body of Christ, yet there are different ways to do so. The text of the prayer: Leader (L): "You have given yourself to us, Lord." People (P): "Now we give ourselves to others." (L) "Your love has made us a new people"; (P) "as a people of love we will serve you with joy." (L) "Your glory has filled our hearts"; (P) "help us to glorify you in all things. Amen." United Methodist Church, At the Lord's Table (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 57.

The 1966 service, which uses virtually the same language and pattern of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's services of 1549 and 1552,¹⁴ is cast in the language of a bounded world-view in which God has ultimate authority over human beings, who are miserable, sinful, wicked children (who deserve to be punished). They are therefore unworthy to receive the blessings of God's grace, and only do receive them because of the perfect sacrifice and atonement of Jesus Christ, whom God, as humanity's heavenly "Father," gives for that sacrifice on behalf of humanity out of his "tender mercy."

The 1988 service, on the other hand, presents an image of God's ongoing work of creation, which is especially incarnated in the life and ministry--and the death and resurrection--of Jesus, God's Anointed One. Jesus' suffering and death are not presented as punishment that should have been ours, but rather as an effect of Jesus' self-giving love for us, which God then transforms into something even better--the community of the church, which embodies Jesus' self-giving love in the world. And although there is a recognition and a claiming of sin and appropriate guilt, it is not wrongdoing done by wicked children, but by adults who make choices and bear the responsibility for those choices. The meaning of the sacrament thus has shifted from guilt/sacrifice/atonement to the

¹⁴Dix, 640-74. One might argue that Cranmer's services were simply reflective of the social milieu of his time-- that the sixteenth century was a time when a bounded world-view was the only one possible. The question I would ask is why Christian history has tended to emphasize that world-view over the open world-view lived by Jesus--and why Methodism left the church services proposed by John Wesley in the eighteenth century (and based on these services from two hundred years earlier) virtually unchanged for another 200 years.

presence of Christ being made known in the breaking of bread and made visible in the lives of the participants.

There is one final difference between the two services that is important to point out, a difference signified by the titles of the two rituals. The 1966 version is "The Order for the Administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion." It is clear from the rubrics (see above, p. 74), that the service is something separate from regular Sunday worship. When the sacrament is "administered," therefore, the focus is entirely on Holy Communion--and, consequently, on our guilt and the sacrifice of Jesus as atonement for our sins.

The 1988 service, however, is "A Service of Word and Table." It is understood to be the basic pattern of worship for United Methodists which, in "proclaiming God's Word and celebrating the Lord's Supper, expresses the biblical, historical, and theological integrity of Christian worship."¹⁵ Although the denomination did not go so far as to require that the Lord's Supper be celebrated every week, it did recommend that the basic pattern of Sunday worship include both proclamation and eucharist (even if the eucharist simply takes the form of a thanksgiving prayer without the actual sacrament).¹⁶ This change holds in tension sermon and sacrament, and takes a giant step backward (forward?) from the Protestant emphasis on preaching over liturgy by giving the eucharist equality of place with the sermon.¹⁷

¹⁵ UMC, United Methodist Hymnal, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-5.

¹⁷ Mack, "The Gospel," 60-62.

It is clear that a shift in world-view has taken place from the 1966 text to the 1988 text. It has been accomplished by using one set of symbols--language--to transform another set of symbols--the elements of the ritual for the Lord's Supper. For in essence, the parts of the ritual remained the same (although they were sometimes used in a different order). Only the language used within the elements was changed, yet through that change a whole new world was constructed. That newly constructed world is supported by the rubrics of the liturgy, which help to construct in physical space (by the naming and placement of the people) the verbal shape of the world. By moving the pastor from in front of the table to behind it, with the community gathered symbolically around it, that piece of church furniture becomes less the altar of sacrifice and more the Thanksgiving dinner table, around which we tell the family stories of who we are and how we got here.¹⁸

Does the denomination reflect this new world? Not yet, primarily because the denomination did not set out intentionally to change its world-view as it changed the liturgy. Instead, it was reclaiming the scriptural and historical roots of worship.¹⁹ And the services have been generally available to congregations only since the hymnals became available for Advent of 1989. In addition, there are several generations of current pastors who were trained using the 1966 service who have not made the switch to the new service, or if they have, have

¹⁸ I am indebted to John S. Rice for that insight made visible in our years of doing Music Camp and Arts and Worship Camp together.

¹⁹ UMC, Book of Services, 8-9.

not captured the vision of openness it provides.³⁰ But as new generations of pastors are trained using the 1989 hymnal, and as those who were trained using the services while they were still in the trial stage begin to reach senior pastorates, the shift should begin to take place and become more visible. To make the shift to an open world-view most effectively, the denomination will need to become aware of the implications for world-view the changes have created, and will need to articulate those implications to clergy and laity.

Other Possibilities for Symbol Change

As this look at the service for the Lord's Supper has suggested, the church creates, transmits, and maintains its world-view within the context of worship. By understanding the liturgy to be an event of ritualized disjunction, it becomes the place in which symbolic and social change can occur intentionally so that the church can shift its world-view. What possibilities do the language, and the liturgy of non-sacramental worship provide for symbol change?

Language and Liturgy

As Jonathan Z. Smith has suggested, much of the construction of a symbolic social world is done through the language that is used to describe it.³¹ The importance of language in shaping one's view of the world is hard to underestimate:

Language and human thought are closely intertwined. Can we think, or can we be conscious, without language of some kind? Awareness or consciousness of ourselves as separate persons and of others takes shape in language. . . .

³⁰ I base this statement on experiencing communion led by older colleagues.

³¹ J. Z. Smith, Map Is Not Territory, 141.

Therefore, self-conscious language is essential to our humanness. . . .

We can use language to create our identity and search for reality. But at the same time, we have received a language that has meanings and order in it. That language has molded us in the past and molds us while we use it."

The language that the church uses in worship--in the prayers, the hymns, the sermons--transmits to the participants a particular world shaped by language. (I use the term "participants" advisedly; more than simply hearers or observers of this spoken world, I would submit that in hearing, speaking, and singing language, persons participate in the world that it creates.) Thus, if the church is to change the shape of the world it presents, the language by which that world is described has to be changed. Those persons responsible for the design of the liturgy will need to develop a self-conscious awareness of the world they are constructing through the elements of the liturgy."

For example, I am aware that I have a particular understanding of what the gospel is all about, which I reflect in the liturgies I design and the sermons I preach. That understanding reflects my open world-view, a world-view that resonates with the world-view of Jesus that was uncovered in the preceding chapter. And so I lift up the boundary-crossing elements of scripture text and symbol, down-playing shame-based guilt masquerading as personal sin that keeps persons "in place." I

¹¹ United Methodist Church, Words That Hurt, Words That Heal: Language About God and People (Nashville: Graded Press, 1985), 5-6.

¹² I recognize that the line between language and liturgy is blurred. The liturgy is what happens when Christians gather to praise God; it is how they do what they do when they praise God; it is the order in which they do what they do; and it is the language by which they do it. And although preaching will be treated separately, it too is an element of the liturgy.

highlight Jesus' acceptance of those who were marginalized by society, his critique of the social structures of his day, his vision for society pointed to in the metaphors and parables about the Kingdom of God, and the wholeness of the divine image in which human beings are created--a wholeness Jesus invited both women and men to reclaim for themselves.

Each week in the congregation I serve, I design the liturgy to help me illuminate the particular facet of the Christian faith that is the subject of the sermon for the week. The general pattern I use to choose that facet is the liturgical year, which leads the congregation through the festival cycle that focuses on Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost), and the season after Pentecost (Ordinary Time), which focuses on the life and ministry of the church as the body of Christ. As I choose the hymns and prayers, and work with the Music Director in choosing appropriate choir anthems, I am constantly aware of the message I am presenting to the congregation.

If, for example, I am trying to make clear the open world-view represented by the Service of Word and Table examined above, one of the hymns I might choose is "I Come With Joy."³⁴ I would not choose "There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood,"³⁵ which supports the bounded world-view of sacrifice from the 1966 service. An examination of the texts will show why.

³⁴ UMC, United Methodist Hymnal, no. 617.

³⁵ Ibid., no. 622.

"I Come With Joy"¹⁶

I come with joy to meet my Lord,
 forgiven, loved and free,
 in awe and wonder to recall
 his life laid down for me,
 his life laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
 to find, as all are fed,
 the new community of love
 in Christ's communion bread,
 in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
 each proud division ends.
 The love that made us makes us one,
 and strangers now are friends,
 and strangers now are friends.

And thus with joy we meet our Lord.
 His presence, always near,
 is in such friendship better known;
 we see and praise him here,
 we see and praise him here.

Together met, together bound,
 we'll go our different ways,
 and as his people in the world,
 we'll live and speak his praise,
 we'll live and speak his praise.

"There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood"¹⁷

There is a fountain filled with blood
 drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
 and sinners plunged beneath that flood
 lose all their guilty stains.
 Lose all their guilty stains,
 lose all their guilty stains;
 and sinners plunged beneath that flood
 lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see

¹⁶ © 1971 by Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, Illinois. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

¹⁷ William Cowper, "There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood," (ca. 1771), in The United Methodist Hymnal, no. 622.

that fountain in his day;
and there may I, though vile as he,
wash all my sins away.
Wash all my sins away.

.

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
shall never lose its power
till all the ransomed church of God be saved,
to sin no more.
Be saved, to sin no more.

.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
thy flowing wounds supply,
redeeming love has been my theme,
and shall be till I die.
And shall be till I die.

.

Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing thy power to save,
when this poor lisping, stammering tongue
lies silent in the grave.
Lies silent in the grave.

.

The language of "I Come With Joy" shares the vision of the 1988 service that we are forgiven, loved, free; that communion is community, rather than sacrifice; that Christ is present in the breaking of the bread; that those who are "different" are to be welcomed and understood to be friends; that we are Christ's people in the world. The language of "There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood" drips with sacrifice and atonement; "vile" "sinners," for example, are acceptable only because they have been plunged into the blood of the sacrificial Lamb and washed clean of "their guilty stains."

A final note on supporting an open world-view through the liturgy: neurolinguistics tells us that not everyone experiences the world in the same way. Some persons are visual (experiencing the world through pictures or images); some are auditory (sound, tones); and others are

kinesthetic (touch, feelings).¹⁶ If all persons are to participate in an open world-view, therefore, the entire liturgy and the liturgical space, not just the sermon, must incarnate the Word for the day.

Consequently, I include imagistic language, language tied to music that gives it emotional tone, and language that evokes textures and feelings. And I pay attention to the visual impact of the altar area and the sanctuary in general, so that the message the physical space is projecting is appropriate to the verbal message.

Final Thoughts

In the process of saying prayers, singing hymns, hearing and proclaiming the word, and participating in the sacraments, the congregation I pastor states a world-view--an understanding of the place on which it stands as a portion of the Body of Christ. But because I am the one who designs worship, does it really reflect the world-view of the congregation? Does the selection of hymns and prayers, and the singing and saying of them week after week represent real symbol change?

I think it begins the process of real symbol change, because an important criterion for the selection of prayers and hymns is the language used in them--language that supports an open world-view. And, as was noted above, "language . . . molds us while we use it."¹⁷ Over

¹⁶ See Michael Brooks, Instant Rapport (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 24. Neurolinguistics is a way to communicate with others by using the understanding that persons perceive the world differently. It "is the ability to enter someone else's model of the world and let them know that we truly understand their model. AND It's letting someone come into our frame of the world and having an experience of them truly understanding us." (Brooks, 21.)

¹⁷ UMC, Words That Hurt, 6.

time, such language becomes second nature and the world is perceived differently.

Such was my own experience when I first encountered inclusive language as a new seminarian. Although I had grown up in a church with an open world-view, the language used was steeped in patriarchy--typical of the time. Entering seminary in the early 1980s after an absence from church of several years, I stepped into a world that had changed dramatically as a result of ten years of feminist scholarship and critique.⁴⁰ Through feminist writing and thinking, and, at the grass roots level, through women and men who preached and led worship on a weekly basis, the seminary had recognized that the language used to describe God and humanity, especially in the context of worship, can either liberate or oppress. Although inclusive language was originally a shock to me, once my consciousness was raised about the implications of sexist and exclusive language, and after a short while of using inclusive language regularly, its use became second nature to me.⁴¹

One of the other lessons about inclusive language that I learned in seminary was that it was always necessary to introduce each entering class of students to the reasons for using it. This lesson carries over into the local church, where it is important to teach persons to be

⁴⁰ See the works of Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Nelle Morton, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, and Phyllis Trible, for example.

⁴¹ My experience of growing up with an open world-view, even though the language of worship I heard was basically patriarchal language, is a reminder that all three of the possible tools for shifting world-view discussed in this project are important to the process. Learning that critical reflection on scripture is appropriate and necessary provided a counterbalance to the patriarchal language of the liturgy.

conscious of the language they use to name their world--and to be aware of what world they create through their naming. The sermon provides an excellent opportunity for this process to take place. A theory of preaching which self-consciously promotes such reflection is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Preaching Beyond the Horizon

In the preceding chapter, it was observed that liturgy provides an arena in which changing symbols can take place so that social change may take place as well. But why is a social change desired? The purpose of this project has been to explore why Baby Boomers are, by and large, absent from mainline churches, and how mainline churches might change that reality. My contention has been that Baby Boomers are not in church because their world-view is different from that of the persons who currently constitute the membership of most mainline congregations and that, if mainline churches wish to have Baby Boomers participate, then their world-view will require a shift.

Making such a shift is not just a prostituting of the church's value system in order to attract Baby Boomers, however. In Chapter 3 it was argued that the world-view of the Jesus seen in the gospels is also more open than bounded, so that if the church were to make such a shift toward a more open world-view, it would be aligning itself more nearly with the world-view of Jesus and the gospels. That it also provides the church with new tools for living in an increasingly pluralistic society and world is an added benefit. A church which allows for, expects, and searches out diversity offers real resources for shaping a society that can handle the multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious reality in which Americans now live.

All this is not to downplay the difficulty of making the shift to a different world-view. Changing one's world-view involves reconstructing the symbols and language by which one has named--created--one's

world and survived to the present moment. Especially for church members who have lived out of a bounded world-view for decades, the shift is confusing at best, and terrifying at worst, for the world as they have known it must be torn down and rebuilt in a new and unrecognizable way.

Perhaps not in a totally unrecognizable way, however. The last chapter examined how one of the primary rituals in United Methodist tradition--the service for the Lord's Supper--has been reconstructed so that it reflects an open, rather than a closed world-view. The same elements, resignified by using different language, now build a world-view of grace-filled, abundant, communal life rather than a world-view of personal sin remedied only through the one perfect, intentional sacrifice of Jesus. The elements take place in an event of ritualized disjunction, which this project's world-view model suggests is a place where symbols may be changed in such a way that social change may follow.

Within the regular liturgy is another event of ritualized disjunction, one that happens every Sunday even in traditions where the Eucharist is not celebrated weekly. That event is the sermon, which self-consciously seeks to explain what it means to be a Christian today. What makes the sermon an event of ritualized disjunction is that a gap exists between what it was like to live during Jesus' day and what it is like to live today. The lack of fit between those two worlds represents a disjunction that the preacher bridges weekly in the sermon--usually unconsciously; congregations bridge that gap regularly along with the preacher--again, usually unconsciously. Given this experience, the theory of preaching examined in this chapter proposes bridging the gaps

intentionally between the various worlds in which modern Christians live. By naming the lack of fit intentionally, the sermon can become the place where long-held symbols are re-examined and resignified. It is the place where life can be imagined differently so that, as Paul Ricoeur says, "Changed obedience [can] follow changed imagination."¹ Shifting to an open world-view through symbol change thus becomes possible with a minimum of confusion and terror, because dealing with the disjunction between worlds--in other words, crossing boundaries--is what happens regularly in the sermon.

Jerome H. Neyrey suggests a definition of ritual that gives additional insight into the process of crossing--versus maintaining--boundaries. He outlines the differences between ritual and ceremony in five categories: (1) frequency, (2) calendar, (3) time focus, (4) who presides, and (5) purpose.² Neyrey suggests that rituals are infrequent, while ceremonies occur routinely; rituals occur only when necessary, while ceremonies have fixed calendar dates. Rituals "take us from present needs to future possibilities. . . . Ceremonies, however, look to the past and celebrate its influence on the present by representing actions and events."³ Those who preside over rituals are professionals, while presiders at ceremonies are officials. The final difference Neyrey notes between ritual and ceremony is in their purpose:

¹ Quoted by Walter Brueggemann in a lecture at the Ministers Convocation of the School of Theology at Claremont, November, 1989.

² Neyrey, 76.

³ Neyrey, 77.

the purpose of a ritual is to facilitate the crossing of social boundaries, while the purpose of a ceremony is to confirm those boundaries.⁴

Several of Neyrey's observations are useful in thinking of preaching as an event of ritualized disjunction. Because preaching happens regularly, Neyrey would presumably classify it as a ceremony. But if one hopes to change a symbol system so as to shift world-view, then the time focus of ritual (present needs to future possibilities) and the purpose of ritual (to facilitate crossing social boundaries) are necessary to accomplish that goal. These characteristics of ritual are included in the understanding of preaching this chapter develops.⁵

The Gap Theory of Preaching

Burton L. Mack, professor of New Testament at the School of Theology at Claremont and the Claremont Graduate School, has begun to develop a "gap" theory of preaching in his unpublished manuscript, "The Gospel and the Gaps: A Worldly Theory of Preaching." His theory grows out of what Mack sees as the "dis-ease" that has begun to permeate American Christianity as it confronts a world that is radically different from the "Christian" world it envisioned creating on American soil.⁶ Mack begins by assuming that Christianity is a religion like any other, one that can be studied and thought about by using the tools that cultural anthropologists and historians of religions use to study

⁴ Neyrey, 76-77.

⁵ Interestingly enough, Mack describes preaching as a ritual, although he does not use Neyrey's categories or definition--explicitly. However, Mack's theory of preaching assumes that it can--and should--function in the same way that Neyrey describes the function of ritual. Mack, "The Gospel and the Gaps," 35.

⁶ Mack, "The Gospel and the Gaps," 15.

religions other than Christianity.⁷ Mack also assumes that Christians can be trusted to think critically about their faith and the relationship it has to their experience of living in the world, without losing that faith.⁸

To assume that Christianity is a religion like any other is to take a step back from it in order to observe the ways in which Christians use myth and ritual to create a particular version and vision of reality. One of the distinguishing features of Christianity is that myth (the Bible) and ritual (the liturgy) are joined together, so that the ritual does not make much sense apart from the myth.⁹ For example, the celebration of the Eucharist is understood to be a reenactment of Jesus' Last Supper as described in various biblical texts.

To assume that Christianity is a religion like any other is to question Christianity's claim to a unique truth that discounts any other religion's understanding of truth.¹⁰ Rather than believing that the only way to the Father (salvation) is through Christ (John 14:6b), a faith perspective that assumes that Christianity is a religion like any other trusts that if God is the creator of the whole world, then it is God who has created all the ways in which it is possible to understand the Divine, whether that be from the perspective of Buddhism, Hinduism, shamanism-- or feminism.

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰ Ibid., 98.

To assume that Christianity is a religion like any other is to recognize that Christian cultures use religion as a symbol system to order and make sense of the experience of living. They do this through the establishment of an "ideal" vision toward which reality yearns and the explanation for why reality doesn't match the ideal.¹¹ Thus for Christianity, the "ideal" vision is of the Garden of Eden in which human beings "were . . . naked [innocent] and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25), and in which all one's desires and needs were taken care of without toil. The reality is that life is hard work in which needs sometimes do not get met (much less one's desires). The reason for the difference between the ideal and the reality is "The Fall": humanity's disobedience of God's commands and the resulting punishment meted out by God (Gen. 3). Jesus' mission to establish the Kingdom of God can thus be seen as a mission to restore humanity to the Garden, accomplished through his sinless suffering and death on our behalf, although the Garden has been transformed into the New Jerusalem, which is where the tree of life now grows (Rev. 22:2).

The second assumption Mack makes, that Christians can be trusted to think critically about their faith and their experience of living as faithful people in the "real" world, is at the heart of his theory of preaching. For by assuming that Christian faith will not be destroyed in the process of thinking critically, Mack opens the way for the Christian imagination to be expanded so that a shift in world-view becomes possible, a shift that allows for the diversity which is springing up on American soil to be celebrated and affirmed.

¹¹ Ibid., 91-95.

The Four Worlds of the Christian Imagination

Mack begins his theory by asking, "What is the 'Christian' imagination?" It is the way in which persons who identify themselves as followers of Jesus of Nazareth hold in tension a variety of worlds from a faith perspective. Mack identifies four specific worlds: the world of the Bible, the world of the liturgy, the world of society and the world of culture. These four worlds are sometimes synthesized into two: the church and society.¹²

The biblical world involves people, places and things that happened long ago in a "once upon a time" sort of way, but which Christians also assume have some basis in historical fact. The primary feature of the biblical world is that it is a world constructed around the relationship between a God called Yahweh/Abba¹³ and a particular extended family and its descendants (some who are blood-related and some who are adopted).¹⁴

The world created by the liturgy serves to bring the biblical world into the present, so that the participants feel as if the stories of that family and its relationship to Yahweh/Abba "are in fact being read or spoken to and for [them] right now."¹⁵ The liturgy also serves to create a consensus among the participants that they, too, in their

¹² Mack, "The Gospel," 41.

¹³ I am combining two of the names for God found in the Bible, one from the Hebrew Scriptures (Yahweh) and one from the New Testament (Abba), to indicate the continuity between the two traditions for Christians.

¹⁴ Mack, "The Gospel," 43.

¹⁵ Mack, "The Gospel," 44.

own time and place, are partners in relationship with Yahweh/Abba and are committed to bringing Yahweh/Abba's vision for society into being.¹⁶

The final two worlds are worlds from our "everyday" lives: society and culture. Society is "the social order that structures the network of institutions and the pattern of activity" by which individuals in a given geographical location negotiate how to live with one another in that place.¹⁷ In the United States, for example, society includes such expectations as persons will drive on the right hand side of the street, and that the President and Vice President of the country will be newly elected every four years and the transfer of power from one President to the next will be accomplished with much fanfare but no bloodshed.

Culture is the cluster of "unquestion[ed] assumptions about the way the world works or should work" made visible or concrete through a system of symbols: myths, ideologies, values, etc. Thus we live with the assumption that driving American-made cars on the right-hand side of the road is the best way to drive (although that assumption was challenged in the 1970s and 1980s, with a concomitant drop in the sale of American cars). And the pomp and circumstance and fanfare that surrounds the swearing in of a new President includes the use of symbols that reminds us of who and what we understand the United States of America to be; the use of the west side of the Capitol building, for example, starting in the 1980s, not only provides the opportunity for more persons to watch the swearing in of the President in person, but serves as reminder and

¹⁶ Mack, "The Gospel," 45.

¹⁷ Mack, "The Gospel," 46a.

symbol (seemingly forgotten by Washington "insiders") that most of the country lies west of the District of Columbia.

These four worlds of Bible, liturgy, society, and culture are the primary worlds that are involved in making the Christian imagination. In addition, each person brings with her or him a number of other personal worlds of memory and experience (such as occupation, ethnicity, and personal history).¹⁴ Although the personal worlds of the hearers may vary widely, the preacher can generally count on the four major worlds being present as common resources for the preaching task of helping Christians imagine what it means to be faithful in this day and age.

What immediately becomes apparent, however, is that there are gaps between the four worlds. The world of the Bible is very different from the world in which most twentieth century Americans live; Jesus, for example, knew nothing of automobiles or the election of Presidents. On the other hand, the liturgy, which creates the world of the church's tradition and history, often uses prayers and hymns with agricultural images that are more appropriate to Jesus' world than to the urban realities of much of twentieth century life. For persons who have seen sheep only in the movies, for example, what does it mean to have a savior who is a good shepherd? There are also gaps between the cultural world and the reality of society; for example, the ideals of American culture ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"), voiced with such power in the 1993 presidential inaugural address, do not truly

¹⁴ Mack, "The Gospel," 49.

reflect the everyday realities of life for the 20% of American children who live below the poverty level.

But it is precisely within these gaps, says Mack, as people struggle to make sense of the incongruencies between their various worlds, that opportunities come for vital preaching that can address the dis-ease that afflicts contemporary Christians.¹⁹ It is precisely within these gaps that opportunities also come for changing symbols so that social change follows and a shift in world-view takes place.

How does one "play the gaps" so that one can imagine life differently? Let us reconsider a story examined in Chapter 3: The Bent-over Woman (Luke 13:10-17), which could be described as an instance in which Luke's Jesus is "playing the gaps." As the reader may recall, Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath day when he sees a woman who has been crippled for eighteen years. He sets her free from her infirmity, incensing the synagogue leader, who accuses Jesus of breaking the fourth commandment by curing on the Sabbath. Jesus turns the leader's argument on its head by reminding him and the gathered congregation of the range of meaning implied by the commandment for Sabbath rest.

This inversion is what Mack means by "playing the gaps" between the four worlds. Jesus assumes that his hearers have brought with them the "biblical" world of the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically the Torah. In addition, he assumes that his hearers know both the Exodus and the Deuteronomy traditions of the ten commandments. The setting of the story--teaching in the synagogue--is understood as a "liturgical" setting, which, Mack says, provides the bridge between the ancient world

¹⁹ Mack, "The Gospel," 34.

of the scriptures and the contemporary world of the hearers. The response of the crowd and the synagogue ruler to The Bent-Over Woman's affliction and healing (to ignore her on the one hand, and be angry on the other), indicates that they have brought with them the worlds of their society and culture. What Jesus does is highlight elements of those worlds in a different way, so that they no longer "fit" as they did before. In struggling with these "mis-fit" worlds, the crowd begins to understand them in a new way--in a way that invites them to change the meaning of the symbols "crippled woman" and "Sabbath rest" in such a way that their social behavior changes as well.

The Four Authorities of the Christian Imagination

Having seen how Jesus "plays the gaps," how does one bridge the gaps between the different worlds? Mack suggests that the four authorities of Methodist "theologizing"--scripture, tradition, reason, and experience--may prove helpful.²⁰ Mack correlates each authority to a specific pair of worlds. For example, scripture--the written text--functions as the bridge between the world of the Bible and the world of culture. The influence of biblical norms in Western culture because of a common scriptural text is a product of that bridging.²¹ Tradition, which Mack uses as a bridge between the world of the Bible and the world of the liturgy, is the repository of the church's beliefs and practices throughout time, and helps to make contemporary Christians feel a part

²⁰ Mack, "The Gospel," 53. These four authorities are often called the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral."

²¹ Mack, "The Gospel," 54A.

of the "once upon a time" events of the biblical world.¹² Experience serves as the bridge between the liturgy and the social world, as Christians try to make sense of living as faithful persons in their own social context.¹³ The fourth authority, reason, helps to bridge the gap between culture and society, as persons make judgements about how the world is and should be.¹⁴

Another of the gospel stories examined in Chapter 3--the story of The Woman who Anointed Jesus--serves as an example of how to use the four authorities with the four worlds. Leaving aside the question of the story's historicity, how did the text function within the community for whom Mark's gospel was written?

The setting of the story is a meal. The rest of the gospel indicates to us that table fellowship in Mark's community was a way in which to specify who was inside the community and who was outside it.¹⁵ Probably there was some ritual associated with gathering for a meal, which would allow us to understand the meal as a liturgical context. In that society, women normally were not allowed to participate in male table fellowship groups; the experience of this woman, whom Jesus allowed to remain, changed the social boundaries. The woman's action of anointing brought to mind the story of the anointing of David from the Hebrew scriptures; the culture assumed that such action should be

¹² Mack, "The Gospel," 53.

¹³ Mack, "The Gospel," 54A.

¹⁴ Mack, "The Gospel," 54A. Scripture, tradition, experience and reason may well make bridges between other worlds than those to which Mack has assigned them.

¹⁵ See, for example, Mark 2:15-17.

performed by men only. In Mark's community, however, there is now a written text (scripture) showing that Jesus had affirmed the woman's action. It functions as a bridge between the "biblical" world of David's anointing and the world of the contemporary culture, so that women in Mark's community could claim positions of leadership. By using language that alluded to the community's ultimate table fellowship story (the Last Supper) to describe the woman's actions, this story provides a bridge between the Last Supper and every other table fellowship experience in the community. By his pronouncement that her actions would be remembered wherever the gospel was preached, the Jesus of this story supports the claim to leadership by women within the Markan community. Thus one could reasonably assume that the way the world should be--and is within Mark's community--includes women in positions of authority, regardless of whether the outside society supported such an understanding.

Preaching as Meditation

How does preaching work in a context where the gaps between worlds are taken seriously? Mack suggests that the mode of preaching required in such a context is meditation rather than proclamation.¹⁶ Proclamation assumes that there is something to be proclaimed--a truth or a moral, e.g.--and that the Bible is where such truths and morals can be found.¹⁷ Proclamation continues the assumption that Christianity is

¹⁶ See Mack, "The Gospel," "With the Bible in the Background," (chap. 3), 56-76, for a full discussion.

¹⁷ Mack, "The Gospel," 63.

different from other religions and has a unique claim to reality that is circumscribed by the truths and morals found in the Bible.

Meditation, however, takes seriously the gaps between the worlds as described above. It takes seriously the assumption that Christians can think critically about their faith in light of those gaps. It understands the task of the preacher to be articulating the gaps and leading the congregation in thinking through both the implications of those gaps and possible ways to bridge them. Preaching as meditation thus moves away from absolutizing (idolizing) the Bible (or any other of the worlds), and provides the flexibility necessary for dynamic religious belief that is responsive to changing social and cultural realities.¹¹

Moving preaching from proclamation to meditation requires a resignification of the symbol "sermon." Part of that resignification involves understanding the sermon not as a monologue on the part of the preacher, nor as a dialogue between preacher and text, but as a "triadialogue" between preacher, congregation and text. For congregation members who have listened to decades of sermons proclaimed from the pulpit, it may be difficult to understand why such a resignification is necessary. And it may make them uncomfortable, because the sermon may seem less "authoritative" if it is meditation and not proclamation. Preaching that is meditation and not proclamation challenges the hierarchical--and patriarchal--mystique that only the trained preacher can say authoritatively what the Word of God means (the Protestant

¹¹ Mack, "The Gospel," 109.

version of not allowing ordinary Christians to read scripture in the vernacular).

To help make the transition from proclamation to meditation easier, Mack gives some practical guidelines for thinking of preaching as meditating on the gaps: (1) touch on two or three of the worlds intentionally, (2) make connections between the worlds by paying strict attention to how they are ranked, compared, etc., (3) acknowledge the incongruencies honestly, (4) stay within the frame of reference provided by the scripture texts, the prayers and hymns, and/or the cultural and social points being addressed, and (5) play the gaps with a constructive proposal in mind.¹⁹

The fifth guideline is crucial for achieving the goal of this project. For example, if I were a preacher seeking to move my congregation toward an open world-view, I would keep that goal in mind constantly as my constructive proposal, as I explored with the congregation how our experience of the diversity of reality can be managed and understood from a Christian perspective.²⁰

These guidelines help to maintain the integrity of the preaching event as a serious consideration of what it means to be Christian in this day and age, rather than as the preacher's personal soap box. They also help the hearers construct a reliable framework or process for bridging the gaps, thereby helping to eliminate the confusion and disorientation experienced when worlds collide. With repetition, this

¹⁹ Mack, "The Gospel," 112-13.

²⁰ For a further example, see the sermon in the Appendix, which was written and preached, using Mack's guidelines, to test the theory.

framework and approach to preaching teaches congregation members that gaps are normal and natural, the space where life can be reimagined creatively.

EPILOGUE

The process of writing--and rewriting--something like this project is, I have discovered, a journey. The seven months that have taken place since the preface was first written and this epilogue completed have been a time of reflection on, and modification of the original question: "Why aren't Baby Boomers in Church?" At the end I find that Baby Boomers are a symbol for me of all those who are not in church because their experience and perception of the world is different from what the church says it should be. They are a symbol for me of all who are different from those persons who currently make up the membership of the church, and who consequently do not feel comfortable within it.

And so at the end of my journey I am more convinced than ever that what I have proposed here is crucial for the long-term vitality and relevance of the church. We live in a world that changes in the blink of an eye; if the church continues to live from a bounded world-view, the world outside may well pass us by. Shifting to a world-view of openness will enable the church to avoid the future shock described by Letty Russell, because it will have the flexibility to "seek out new questions and new relationships."¹

At the end of my journey I find that Paul Ricouer's statement that "changed obedience follows changed imagination" rings just as true now as it did when I first heard Walter Brueggemann quote it in November, 1989. In many ways that has been the irritation around which the pearl of this project (with all the bumps and contours of a freshwater pearl)

¹ Russell, Growth in Partnership, 31.

has formed. How do we change our imagination so that we will act differently?

I have suggested three possible ways: through a new approach to Bible study; by using the power of the liturgy to create and transmit an alternative world-view; and by preaching intentionally in the gaps between the worlds that shape the Christian imagination. These three regular activities of the church provide fertile soil for the symbol and social change that leads to a new understanding of the world. By moving toward a more open world-view, the church embraces the gospel's invitation to wholeness. By moving to a more open world-view, the church becomes the community it has claimed to be for twenty centuries--one that welcomes persons of all races, genders, and classes. By moving to a more open world-view, the church claims its authentic identity as the Body of Christ alive in the world, willing to work with all persons to make life on this planet a reflection of the liberating, transforming love of God made visible in Jesus of Nazareth.

In the end, moving to a more open world-view is an act of hospitality. Hospitality was once a life-or-death spiritual discipline practiced by Christians, who opened their homes to pilgrims rather than let them stay in roadside inns where they might be robbed, hurt, or killed. In our broken and fragmented world, such hospitality may once again be a matter of life or death. In choosing to live beyond the horizon, the church opens itself to persons--like the Baby Boomers--who are searching for the meaning and vision that the gospel provides.

APPENDIX

The following sermon was written and preached at the First United Methodist Church of Bellflower, to test Mack's gap theory of preaching. It was one of a series of sermons preached on the symbols in the sanctuary's stained glass windows.

"The Great Commission"

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven has come near." . . . And he said to them, "Follow me, for I will make you fish for people." . . . Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. . . . "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them"

Before we focus on the Great Commission and our window for this morning, I'd like to invite you to ponder with me for a moment what it means to preach. The first reading for the morning said, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand'..." and later on, "He went all about the Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" What does it mean to preach?

I pose the question because our window and our primary text for the day raise some issues for me about what it means to be a Christian in this day and age that are in conflict with the traditional interpretation of "The Great Commission." In having those issues raised for me, I find myself to be a case study this morning for my dissertation, which deals, in the broadest sense, with how to be Christian in a world that

¹ Matt. 4:17, 19, 23; Matt. 28:19-20.

looks nothing at all like the world in which Jesus lived, nothing at all like the world for which the gospels were written, nothing at all like the world in which the Church was originally shaped and formed.

And so I ask again, what does it mean to preach?

Traditionally, Protestants have understood preaching to be proclamation--which means that every Sunday morning the preacher stands before the congregation and tells them what it is the Bible has to say to them today. To proclaim is to say that I--as the ordained preacher--have the Word of God, and you--as laity--do not. To proclaim is to utter truths, truths which you, the congregation, are expected to accept as gospel, without considering for yourselves what you think about the truths I propose.

What I propose in my dissertation, however, is an understanding that preaching is meditation, rather than proclamation--meditation that you and I enter into together. To go further, I understand preaching to be dialogue--really triologue--conversation between you and I and the text, as we explore together what the scriptures say, and how their meaning impacts the way in which we live as followers of Jesus Christ in our world. For me to take seriously our denomination's belief that all Christians are ministers because of their baptism--for this congregation to take seriously what we print in our bulletin each week, that the ministers of this church are all its members--is for you and me to engage together in consideration of the meaning that the biblical texts may have for us.

Sometimes we may find that the scriptures speak directly and clearly and nearly contemporarily to our situation. And sometimes, as

is the case today, we may find that our world is different enough from the world in which the gospel was written to require that we question whether the text can be taken at face value in our time and in our situation. Preaching as meditation, rather than proclamation, invites all of us to think critically about how our discipleship in the here and now is affected by these words of scripture written so long ago.

Preaching as meditation reminds us that the scriptural record is one in which, over time, the people of God have reflected on their history and have come to interpret earlier scripture in a new and different way.

And so I would invite you to meditate with me on the meaning of this morning's text. To symbolize that we are in this together, I am going to step down from the pulpit and join you in the nave.

The writer of the gospel of Matthew, especially, is a wonderful example of someone who reflected on his scripture--the Old Testament--and realized that his understanding of what it meant to be a faithful member of God's people required a new interpretation of that scripture. In the first reading for this morning, for example, we heard how he rethought the meaning of the prophet Isaiah, and made it appropriate to his time and his situation. In that same way, I invite you to join with me in meditating on the Great Commission, found in the final verses of the gospel of Matthew:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Our window symbolizes the traditional interpretation of the Great Commission beautifully. The ship of the church has set sail upon its

journey to the four directions of the earth, symbolized by the arrows on the arms of the cross, to make disciples of all nations; the growth of the church around the world is symbolized by the green vine in the shape of a circle. It is a powerful symbol, one that has, indeed, sent the gospel around the world in the past twenty centuries, so that there is now hardly a city or town in the whole world that has not heard the name of Jesus Christ.

But the history of the Great Commission is not just one of unmitigated success. It is also the history of some of the bloodiest wars, some of the most despicable eras in human history. The crusades, the Inquisition, the decimation of native Americans, even the holocaust are the result of the church taking too literally this injunction to make disciples of all nations, of teaching persons to obey Jesus' commandments. As Christians, I believe we must look honestly at our history and consider whether we have truly fulfilled Jesus' commandments, or our own quest for power and authority.

For what, after all, were Jesus' ~~commandments~~? The one new one that he gave his disciples was that we love one another as he loved us. Were there any others? That we love God with all our hearts and minds and souls and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. Is the Inquisition a reflection of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves? Is the forced Christianization of American Indians a reflection of loving others as he loved us? Is the Holocaust a reflection of loving God with our entire beings? Most of us would say no, I imagine; most of us would say, "But wait a minute--those are extreme examples of Christians run amok." Yes, they are extreme; but aren't they really just the logical

extension of the great commission? If Jesus commissions us to make disciples of all nations, and if people or nations refuse our asking them nicely, then aren't we empowered by this statement to make them disciples "by whatever means necessary"? If we have all authority in heaven and on earth behind us, who are they to gainsay us?

This past week I did a memorial service for someone who, as the saying usually goes, "was raised Methodist." This man had been a paratrooper in World War II, a sergeant, who, along with his men, was subjected to a sermon on the eve of battle designed to scare them into faith--reminding them that they were sinners, that they might very well die on the morrow, and were they prepared to meet their maker, or were they candidates for eternal damnation? The men--who were really little more than boys, were undeniably scared--but they had been scared before hearing the sermon; they were now virtually paralyzed with fear. The sermon infuriated the sergeant, who got up before the sermon was over, took his men with him, and never again darkened the door of a church. Here was a disciple who was "unmade," if you will, by a minister who invoked all the authority of heaven and earth inappropriately. My guess is that if Jesus had been giving the sermon, the men would have heard how much God loved them, and how God would be with them throughout the trials of the following day, no matter what happened to them. Instead of losing disciples, more might very well have been made.

It seems to me that the great commission must be understood in light of the way in which Jesus made disciples. The first reading for the morning tells us how four of the twelve apostles were made: Jesus invited them, and they responded. There was no coercion; there was no

sword held to their throats, no loss of limb or property threatened, no threats at all, in fact. Instead, Jesus makes them an offer: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people," says the New Revised Standard Version. And for whatever reason--did the job sound easier? Was it Jesus' strength of character and charisma? -- for whatever reason, Peter and Andrew, James and John dropped what they were doing and followed him. Jesus made them an offer which it was possible for them to refuse; they chose not to refuse it, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The text goes on to say that Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching and preaching and healing--so that wherever Jesus preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, his message was accompanied by visible signs of what that kingdom looked like: those who were marginalized by society would be the first to enter into Jesus' kingdom. When Jesus sent the twelve out on their mission--which you can read about in Chapter 10--he sends them out to do exactly the same thing: to preach that the kingdom of heaven has come near, and to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. The message throughout the gospel is clear: one cannot preach the kingdom without also healing and raising from the dead.

And so we come again to the Great Commission. What can it mean for us, in our time and our situation?

It seems to me that the Great Commission is an invitation to us. Not to make disciples by destroying other cultures and religious perspectives, but to invite others to discipleship by our example. To teach others to obey everything that Jesus has commanded us is to teach others what it means to love in the way that he loved us, to love God

with our entire being and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is to love others by giving of ourselves, even when that giving puts us into danger. It is to seek to understand others as we wish to be understood—to be accepted for who we are without being remade in someone else's image of who we should be. It is to remember that the preaching of the kingdom is always accompanied by healing, and so we are invited to find ways to heal our world and our society so that the kingdom may be revealed.

It seems to me that the Great Commission is an invitation to see that the nations have come to us, and all that we need to do to make disciples of them is to step outside our door. To walk, for example, the two and a half blocks down Maplewood to the Mid-Cities Help Center, and preach the kingdom by helping to heal the poverty in which so many persons in our community find themselves. It is to walk down Bellflower Boulevard and over to the library and preach the kingdom by offering to help someone learn to read. To fulfill the Great Commission is to offer to be a link in the prayer chain, if one cannot get out and help at Mid-Cities Help Center or the library. To fulfill the Great Commission is to share your story of what a difference Christ has made in your life with someone who is new to the faith here in our congregation.

It seems to me that our Great Commission window provides us with a unique challenge and opportunity. For every time we see that window, I hope it reminds us to ask ourselves, "How am I making new disciples? How am I fulfilling Jesus' commandment to love others as he loved me? How am I using all the authority in heaven and earth that has been given to me to fulfill this Great Commission?"

And now back to preaching as meditation. You have just heard my part of the trialogue, which has been mostly between me and the text. I would invite you to spend a few minutes in reflecting on what I have said, and to respond by using the sheets of blank paper that are in your bulletin to share your comments and reflections. You may put them in the offering plates, and next week I'll share what we have considered together. Eventually, I would like the sermon to be truly a dialogue, where there is time for questions and answers, for shared reflections within the context of the service.

Spend a few moments now in reflection on the Great Commission--the window and the text.

Amen.

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